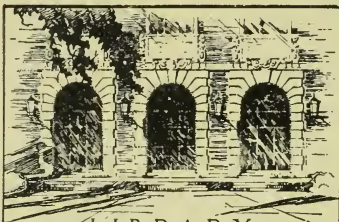


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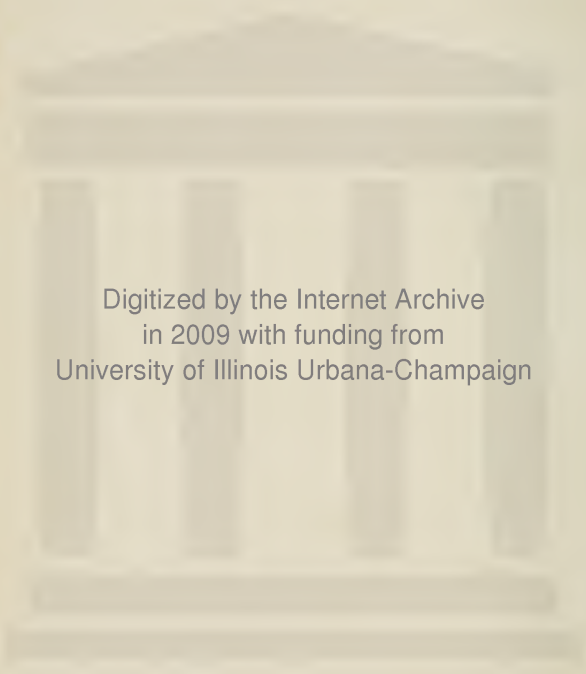
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THE
DISCIPLINE OF LIFE.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way ;
But to act that each to-morrow
Find us further than to-day.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb driven cattle—
Be a hero in the strife!

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

The object of the following book has been, as the title imports, to show how characters may be tried and improved through the common events of common life.

I believe reality to be stranger than fiction, life to be more romantic than any romance ever yet written ; but the strange events of life are, "like angels' visits, few and far between." They come but at intervals, and come not to *all*. My wish was rather to show the trials and temptations of common life—such life as all may know ; no exciting scenes, no startling incidents ; with but just so much of romance as at some time or other tinges the life of almost all men.

I have, therefore, chosen the quietest and simplest scenes of the world, and have en-

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deavoured only to describe such characters as are to be met with in the common intercourse of every-day life.

I am well aware that the object I have mentioned is not a poor one. The book of human nature being at the same time the most interesting and the most difficult of studies, the attempt to describe it even in its simplest forms is ambitious. It is not, therefore, because the object is a low one that I would ask indulgence, but rather indulgence for the ambition that attempted anything so high, and forgiveness for having come so far short of it.

ISABEL DENISON.

'Tis an old tale, and often told.

Marmion.

THE
DISCIPLINE OF LIFE.

ISABEL DENISON.

CHAPTER I.

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman ;
Though they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human.

Then, at the balance, let's be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*.

BURNS.

In the close back room of a small ornamented cottage, on the outskirts of the village of Ellerton, in the arms of an old nurse, lay

an infant of a few hours old. It seemed about to resign its short life; to close for ever the eyes which had only just opened on the world. Two girls—one of about seventeen, the other twenty-three years of age—stood beside the nurse, anxiously watching the feeble struggles of the child.

“Must it die, nurse?” at last asked the elder one. “Poor Amy!”

“I’m afeard it must, Miss Shepherd. I’ve seen many babies very weak like, just at the first, but never one so bad as this.”

“I will go and tell Amy, then — she may wish to give it one look while it is still alive.”

Miss Shepherd walked slowly into the next room, and softly undrew the curtains of the bed. “Amy!” she murmured.

The invalid opened her large blue eyes, and turned her pale face on her sister.

“Amy, dear Amy, I’m afraid your poor child is very ill. Nurse thinks it cannot live long. I thought it best to come and tell you.”

“It is well,” whispered the young mother;

“then my child is safe in heaven!” And she languidly closed her eyes again, and turned away her face.

Surprised, and somewhat anxious, Rachel Shepherd returned to watch by the child. An hour passed away, during which it seemed to be struggling with death. Then a change came; — the livid hue disappeared, and at length it slightly unclosed its eyes.

“It will live,” said the nurse, with a smile of triumph, and she got up to lay it in the cradle.

“Let me take it to Amy,” said Charlotte, the younger girl; “it will please her so much to see it for one moment.” And, taking the tiny roll of flannel in her arms, she approached her sister.

“Amy, your child, will live — live to bless you!”

Again the invalid opened her eyes, and kissed the child, which Charlotte held to her lips, while she murmured some words too feebly to be heard. But no smile passed over her face, and again she turned away,

almost as if displeased at the interruption.

“Amy seems very weak, nurse,” said Charlotte, as she gave her back the child; “is it right to be so?”

Mrs. Roberts walked quickly into the next room, then in a moment flew past Charlotte down the stairs of the cottage. In another minute she returned with the village doctor, and they went together into Amy’s room. A short time after, the latter came out with a grave face, and asked for Miss Shepherd. Rachel approached.

“I am sorry to tell you, Miss Shepherd, thus abruptly, that your sister is dying. But she is past my skill—I fear she has not many hours to live.”

“Poor Amy!” said Rachel, calmly, “I feared it would be thus. Her short, sad life is ended.” This was spoken musingly, as if to herself. Then, turning to the doctor, she begged him to be so kind as to send Mr. Price to them immediately. He kindly shook her hand, and withdrew.

Rachel again approached her sister's bed. "How do you feel, Amy?" she tenderly asked.

"Better," said the poor girl; and, for the first time, she roused herself, and a smile played on her lips.

"Do you *really* feel better, Amy? I feared it was not so: Mr. Franklin...."

"I know what you would say, Rachel;—I am dying!—I feel it, and I am happy to die."

"Have you no fear?" asked Rachel, bending over her.

"Should I be afraid, Rachel? I have suffered so much, I have thought so much of death....perhaps it is because I am so weak—but I feel happy to die."

"I have sent for Mr. Price, dear Amy, and he will talk to you. Will you look at your poor little child before he comes?" She fetched the infant, now sleeping, and laid it by its mother's side. "We shall call it 'Amy?'" she said, inquiringly.

"No, Rachel, don't let it be like its poor

mother. What is *his* mother's name?—I am so weak, I forget it." She was silent for a moment. "Ah! I remember;—he told me it was Isabel; call her 'Isabel;'—his mother's name may touch him more than his poor wife's. Oh! Rachel, be a mother to my child; and, if ever you see George again, tell him how I loved him and prayed for him. I am very weak—let Mr. Price come quickly."

A few hours later, Mrs. Denison calmly breathed her last.

Mr. Shepherd had been for nearly fifty years curate of Ellerton. The rectors had changed many times, but he had always, not, perhaps, without reason, been passed over. After a time, he became indifferent about preferment, a small private fortune enabling him to live in tolerable comfort; and he wished for nothing that would remove him from Ellerton, to which he was much attached. He was a good man, kind-hearted, and charitable

—but of little intellect, of little knowledge, beyond the commonest theological attainments, and of little marked character of any sort. He had married a woman far superior to himself; but, though he tenderly loved her, she was even till her death — soon after the birth of her fourth child — unappreciated by her husband.

Of his four children, the youngest—a son—was a midshipman; the three daughters grew up in his house. Rachel and Charlotte Shepherd, the eldest and the youngest, although they were both, in strength of character, superior to him, were cast in the same mould. But Amy, the second, was like her mother, as well in her disposition as in her exquisite beauty; and, though there was much affection, there was little sympathy between the sisters. Amy was romantic, dreamy, and melancholy—indulging in visions of brightness and refinement, which it was impossible should ever be realized. Her sisters were busy, active, industrious; devoting themselves, heart and soul, to the good of the

people of Ellerton—in turn assisting, preaching to, and scolding men, women, and children. And yet, Amy was more beloved than they were—though, partly from timidity and partly from indolence, she was unable to busy herself after their fashion; still, wherever sorrow or sickness was to be found, there too she might be seen, with her soft voice and earnest manner comforting and consoling. A guiding hand, a small degree of sympathy, and all might have been well with her; but these she found not. To her sisters—although they fondly loved her; to the neighbours—who could not understand her—she was a foolish, sentimental girl, and nothing more.

One of Amy's passions was scenery; one of her greatest pleasures to wander along the river banks, or in the beautiful woods that surrounded Ellerton. Though again and again repelled, she was always trying to make her sisters partake in her pleasure; but, though they consented, now and then, to go with her out of good-nature, even Rachel could not

conceal from her that she thought it a very useless way of spending her time; and, at length, Amy grew to prefer solitude to unwilling companions. Many and many a day, therefore, she wandered alone; till, one summer afternoon, as she slowly walked along the path of a low copse wood belonging to a deserted Manor House, with her eyes fixed on the ground, she suddenly came upon a young man of noble and rather foreign-looking appearance. He was lying on the grass, with a couple of dogs by his side. Struck by her extreme beauty, as Amy paused, blushed, and then walked on again, he rose, and involuntarily took off his hat; then, calling to his dogs to follow him, went off in an opposite direction. She had not, however, walked much further before she met the young man again. As they drew near to each other, he made a slight sign to one of his dogs; the animal flew at Amy, who stopped, timid and terrified. The stranger came hastily forward, called his dog, and begged her pardon; and so, without fault on Amy's

side, began her acquaintance with Captain Denison.

It is needless to trace the progress of that acquaintance. Within three weeks from the day of their first meeting, Amy was missing from her father's house. To be loved with intense devotion: to be a first object to some human being; to find sympathy, that most entire sympathy of love—these were temptations greater than she could withstand; and she left all to be the wife of one almost a stranger to her, but who, she felt, loved her.

Three months passed, and Amy returned to her home, with a broken heart. For a month Captain Denison had thought but of her; during the next, he was kind and attentive, but far less devoted; the third month, he spent principally in London, while Amy remained at the small country town where he had married her. At the end of the third month, he returned one evening, after an absence of ten days. He dined with her, and his manner had resumed all its original pas-

sionate devotion. After dinner, he suddenly got up, kissed her with fond affection, and left the room. Two hours afterwards, a servant brought her a letter. It contained the certificate of their marriage, a bank-bill for a thousand pounds, and a few words from himself. He told her that he had not dared to confess his marriage to his father; that he could remain at —— no longer; that he sailed for India early on the following morning, and that it might be years before he returned to England. With many expressions of love, he bade her farewell, commending their secret to her keeping, but added not one word as to the place of his destination beyond that it was India.

After a few days of anguish, embittered by remorse, Amy returned to her home. A month afterwards her father died. She never knew that sorrow on her account was the principal cause of the illness which then bore him down. Her sisters felt that it would add an intolerable load to the grief and repentance that seemed to weigh her to the dust, and

they were silent. She had asked and obtained his pardon; and to her, with her gentle voice and tender cares, it was given, more than all others, to soothe and bless his dying hours.

CHAPTER II.

Javan, I know that all men hate my father :
Javan, I fear that all should hate my father :
And therefore, Javan, must his daughter's love,
Her dutiful, her deep, her fervent love,
Make up to his forlorn and desolate heart
The forfeited affections of his kind.

Fall of Jerusalem.

After the death of Amy and their father, the widow of a younger brother of Mr. Shepherd came to live with her nieces, and, in their worldly circumstances, they were more comfortable than they had ever been. The two girls continued their former way of life, except that, with every succeeding year, the child of her sister asked and received more and more of the attention of Miss Shepherd ; and never was a favourite daughter brought up more tenderly than the fatherless and motherless Isabel Denison.

In her first childhood, she gave her aunt unmixed pleasure; for she was a lovely, gentle, affectionate child; and, indifferent as Rachel was to personal appearance in general, even she could not but feel pleasure in the surpassing beauty of her charge. Isabel had the fair complexion and dark auburn hair of her mother; but her figure, her features, and the expression of her countenance, were entirely different. Captain Denison's mother was a Spaniard; and her grandchild had the dark, soft, brilliant Spanish eye, yet more striking and brilliant contrasted with her fair skin. Already, even in childhood, too, her figure promised that undulating grace and dignity common to the Spanish women. She was indeed exquisitely beautiful; and, as she walked along by the side of her aunt, with her noble, almost stately air, and her dark curls waving on her shoulders, the cottagers would come to their doors to gaze; and many a traveller paused upon his way, to admire and to smile upon her.

By degrees, however, as the peculiarities

of her character unfolded themselves, some of the sorrows, as well as the joys, of education appeared. There was, at times, a haughtiness and reserve in the little girl which completely puzzled her aunt; and there were fancies, whims, and refinements, dislikes and antipathies, which Rachel could not understand, and which she hardly knew whether to punish as faults, or to pass over unnoticed.

“I cannot understand Isabel,” she would say to her sister; “when I take her among the poor people, she is so gentle, that I am quite pleased with her; but, if she goes with me to visit our neighbours, she draws herself up as if there was no one good enough for her to speak to.”

The fact was, that the little girl had an instinctive dislike to every thing vulgar. Many children show this dislike very early, unconsciously shrinking from vulgarity and noise, as if refinement of mind were a part of the innocency of childhood. In Isabel, however, it was more than dislike—she seemed to shudder at it.

The first event that broke the monotony of her life was the marriage of Charlotte Shepherd, of which marriage she expressed the strongest disapprobation. A Mr. Jones, who had been a clerk in a counting-house in London, unexpectedly came into possession of a small property in the neighbourhood of Ellerton. Charlotte, though rather on a large scale, was at six-and-twenty still very handsome, and, even at their first meeting, was selected by Mr. Jones from the young ladies of the place as the fortunate mistress of his house.

One evening, Mrs. Shepherd, her nieces, and Isabel, were sitting at tea, at the usual hour of seven, when Mr. Jones appeared. It was the third visit he had paid to their house in the course of a week, and in Rachel's eyes this looked very suspicious.

“ Won't you take a dish of tea, Mr. Jones ?” said old Mrs. Shepherd, as he appeared ; “ you will find it very refreshing this warm evening.”

Mr. Jones gratefully accepted the offer,

drew a chair to the table, and said, turning to Isabel—" Good evening, little lady : what, are you sitting up to tea ? In my day, children were snoring at this hour."

Isabel looked unutterable things, but made no answer. " Not quite so strong, if you please, Mrs. Shepherd ; and, if I might suggest, the sugar, five lumps, before the cream. I've lived a bachelor life so long, that you must excuse my being a little particular." Here was a glance at Charlotte.

" But I hope you don't mean to be a bachelor much longer, sir," said Mrs. Shepherd ; " your new house must want a mistress."

" Very true, ma'am ; and the master, too. In London, I had only to look out of window, and I had plenty of company ; but I have not grown to think trees and flowers companions yet. How should you like to live alone, my little lady ?"

" Very much, sir," replied Isabel, loftily.

" Should you, indeed ! Well, I am a social animal myself, and I think one little quiet

party like this worth whole days of solitude. I never could understand what people found to like in solitude. I hope you don't like it, Miss Charlotte?"

"No," she said, laughing; "I don't think I do at all."

"Oh, Miss Shepherd, by the by, I wished to speak to you about some money-matters. As I am come to live amongst you, I think it my duty to be of some use to the poor. At present I know nobody—will you be my almoner?" He laid a £10 note before her. "Another time, I hope to have assistance nearer home." And this time the glance at Charlotte was so prolonged, that she blushed, and he saw he was understood, which was all he was anxious to know before he made his proposal in due form.

Having finished five cups of tea, he asked Charlotte if she would allow him to choose the geraniums, of which she had promised the cuttings. With a glance at her sister, she acquiesced, and they left the room together.

The door was scarcely closed, when Isabel,

looking earnestly up at Rachel, asked "if Mr. Jones was going to marry Aunt Charlotte?"

"Bless the child!" said Mrs. Shepherd, "what makes her say that?" and, putting on her spectacles, she looked at the closed door, in hopes of gaining some information. Rachel smiled a quiet smile, and turned to Isabel. "What makes you say that, dear?"

"Because I don't like Mr. Jones, and I should be very sorry indeed to see him marry Aunt Charlotte."

"Now, Isabel, there it is again. How often must I tell you, that it is very wrong to indulge these fancies about people. Mr. Jones is very good and very kind, and it is wrong of you to dislike him."

"Then I am very wicked," said the little girl passionately, "for I can't bear him."

"Why, my dear," asked Mrs. Shepherd, "what can you see to dislike in Mr. Jones?"

"Don't ask her, aunt," said Rachel; "Isabel is very naughty to talk so, and she knows it."

Isabel said no more; but the tears swelling

in her large eyes, showed from how deep a feeling she had spoken, and even Rachel was sorry for her, when, on the return of Mr. Jones, radiant with happiness, she saw her shrink from the two loud kisses which he imprinted on each cheek.

The time passed on after Charlotte's marriage, and every day the difference of character between the aunt and niece became more apparent; but it did not diminish the affection existing on either side. Isabel was a docile and obedient child; and in all Rachel's great principles—her rigid sense of duty, her reverence for truth, her self-denial, and self-control, she more than acquiesced. To her narrow-minded views of men and things, her opinion of the frivolousness of accomplishments, her utter blindness to all that was beautiful, she submitted also in silence; but it was with a pain which those only who possessed, like her, a craving after the knowledge of all that was great and noble, could comprehend. It was her disappointment

in this respect which, more than everything else, kept the memory of her unseen father in her mind; she hoped the time would come, when he would remember her, and that with him her brightest visions would be realized. The only talent which Rachel had allowed her to cultivate, was her natural taste for music; and permission for this had been obtained with difficulty, and only through the intercession of Isabel's early enemy, Mr. Jones, who was fond of it; but, the permission, once given, she practised with the energy of genius; and, in after years, so many a dull and lonely hour was brightened by the beauty of her playing, that Rachel never repented the indulgence she had granted.

The next event, and it was a great event in Isabel Denison's quiet life, was the return of her uncle, Captain Shepherd, after twenty years' absence from Ellerton. He had travelled all over the world; had conversed with every variety of person; he sang, he sketched, he spoke almost every language; in short, he seemed to his astonished niece to know every-

thing, and to do everything in the world. In addition, he had the frank, happy, joyous, and yet refined manners of a sailor, and the charm was complete.

At the time of his return, Isabel was a beautiful girl of fifteen, fully able to appreciate all he could teach, all he could tell; and he devoted himself, with great kindness and much pleasure, to amuse, enlighten, and improve her ardent and inquiring mind. To her it was as a new life, as a bright dream; and too soon the flying visit was over, and she must again awake to the common existence of Ellerton.

The day before he left them, Captain Shepherd asked Isabel to walk with him to her sister's; and, Rachel being occupied, they were alone. They proceeded for some time in silence. Captain Shepherd was in low spirits at parting. Isabel was thinking. At last she broke the silence.

“Do you think you shall be going to India, Uncle James, in the course of your travels?”

“Yes, I think it very likely—*most* likely,

indeed. Probably, before six months have passed, I may be there. But why do you ask, Isabel? Have you any commissions?" he added, laughingly.

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "Do you think my father is still there?"

Captain Shepherd was surprised. Rachel had told him that she never mentioned her father. "He was there three years ago," he answered. "I happened to see his name in the newspapers; but, even if he should be there now, India is a large place, dear Isabel, and I am not likely to see him—nor to wish to see him," he added, with a frown, "unless, indeed, you desire it."

Isabel sighed.—"It is quite natural, Uncle James," she said, "that you should not think of him, except—except almost to hate him; but I am his child, and I feel, in spite of all, as if I loved him; and I wish he could know this. You don't think me wrong to love him?" she asked, anxiously, seeing his brows still contracted.

"No, Isabel. I had not thought of it in

that light; but I suppose it may be natural. If I should chance to find him, for your sake, I will do as you wish. But what would you do, should he return and claim you?"

She looked up at him with some surprise. "Go to him," she said simply.

"And leave us all? Rachel, too, who has been like a mother to you?" said he, with some asperity.

Isabel fixed her dark, expressive eyes on his face, as if they would speak all the feelings of her heart; and he seemed to understand her, for he kindly pressed her hand, and they walked on again in silence. It was again Isabel that broke it.

"Do you remember my mother, Uncle James?"

"Remember her!" he said, hastily. The one bitter feeling that brooded within him had been aroused by her manner of speaking of her father, and he was still somewhat under its influence. "Remember Amy, who was more to me than all the world besides! No, Isabel," he continued, with some bitterness, "it was not I

who forgot her ; it was one nearer to her than even I am."

" You have not forgiven my father," she said, sadly.

" Yes," he answered, after a pause, " I have forgiven him. It has been a long, long struggle—it has darkened my whole life ; but I have forgiven him. There was a time when I thought my hand should avenge her ; but it is past....yes, I have forgiven him ; yes, Isabel, for your sake, I have forgiven him now."

In silence they went on, till suddenly he took from his pocket a small case, and put it into her hand.

" Perhaps you have never seen this ; it is, I think, our only picture of Amy."

It was a hasty water-coloured sketch ; but it gave an idea of great beauty.

Isabel gazed upon the soft, lovely, melancholy face till her eyes swam with tears ; it was the first time she had seen the features of either of her parents.

" You shall keep it for me till I come again, dear Isabel. I see you will value it. Forgive

me, if I have seemed harsh. I dreaded that you thought only of your father; but I see it is not so. Let this be the token of forgiveness; and if ever you are rich," he added, with a kind smile, "you shall have it copied for me. And now let us be quick, for it is growing late."

CHAPTER III.

Forgive me, if I cannot trust
Those eyes of heavenly blue;
For she was to my hopes unjust,
Who looked as sweetly true.

Song.

Three years more passed quietly away. Isabel sate, one bright May morning, working with her aunt in their cheerful little drawing-room, when Mrs. Shepherd came in with a face full of importance.

“ Rachel, do you know that Mr. Price has got a new curate?”

“ I heard he was to have one very soon,” said Rachel, quietly.

“ Oh, but he is actually come! I went this morning to call on Mrs. Chapman, and she says that she saw him arrive yesterday. And, do you know, he is going to live with Mr. Price—quite a new thing!”

“ Did Mrs. Chapman like his looks ? ” inquired Rachel, more to satisfy her aunt by some appearance of interest, than from caring in the least what Mrs. Chapman thought.

“ I was going to tell you. She says he looks quite like what you read of in novels—she reads a great many, I know—a kind of hero—so tall and *such* black hair ! She could not see his face ; but, after that, I dare say that he is very handsome indeed.”

Rachel shook her head. “ I am very sorry to hear this ; it never does well in a place like Ellerton. All the silly girls will be fancying he is in love with them.”

“ Well, my dear Rachel, never mind, if he does marry one of them : we have so many young ladies at Ellerton, and so few chances for them to settle, poor things.” Rachel still shook her head. “ Perhaps, however, you are right. I saw the Miss Chapmans at the window of the dining-room, watching Mr. Price’s house, and I shook my stick at them. However, I thought I would come and tell you, and now I must go on with my visits.”

And the old woman hobbled away, not without a secret desire to meet the new curate herself.

She had not been gone many minutes before the maid opened the door, and ushered into the room Mr. Price and the very person of whom they had been speaking.

“ I am only come in for a moment, Miss Shepherd,” began Mr. Price. “ I beg your pardon for troubling you so early ; but I am going the rounds of my parish with my young friend here, and I could not pass your door without introducing him to one who has been for so many years my best assistant. Mr. Grey, this is Miss Shepherd, of whom I have just been talking—and that is Miss Denison.”

The young man bowed and slightly smiled, a mere complimentary smile, but he said nothing. Mrs. Chapman was right, he *was* a hero-looking man ; so tall and dark, and with a countenance so grave and melancholy, almost severe, that it was impossible to see him without interest.

“ No, thank you, Miss Shepherd, I won't

stay. I only just looked in, as I said. Good morning; good bye, Isabel—why are you not out walking this fine morning?”

Mr. Grey slightly bowed again—one look, almost of surprise, he gave to Isabel, but he did not speak, and the door closed.

Rachel once more shook her head. “It will never do,” she said; “how could Mr. Price get such a person? The young ladies of Ellerton will think of nothing else. He appears to me to be only fit for a fine London preacher, such as Mr. Jones tells us about.”

“I don’t think you need be in a fidget, Aunt Rachel,” said Isabel. “Mr. Grey does not look as if he meant to be very familiar with any of us. He is too grave for any of the girls here; they will talk of him for a week, but when they see that he does not think of them, as I feel sure he will not, they will soon grow tired of thinking of him.”

Rachel and Isabel were both right. There was a great excitement at first—a great deal of gossip; but Mr. Grey devoted himself to his duties, and kept entirely aloof from the

society of the place, and the interest in him soon passed away.

Herbert Grey (I must briefly give his history) was the only son of General Grey, a distinguished officer, who also possessed a small property of about £1200 or £1300 a-year. He wished his only son to become a lawyer, both on account of the talents early shown by the boy, and also that he might keep him in England, and be able altogether to withdraw him from his profession, if sickness or old age should make him anxious for his society. Herbert Grey, therefore, went to Oxford. At one-and-twenty he formed a violent attachment to a beautiful girl, the daughter of a banker in the neighbourhood. She returned his love; there was no great objection to the marriage, and, consent being given on all sides, they were merely to wait till he had gone through the first hard study necessary to his profession. They were engaged—they appeared to live but for each other, and they parted only for six months, during which time he was to begin his studies in London.

Before the six months had passed, the girl had chosen another and a richer lover; and the first that Herbert heard of her inconstancy was the announcement of her marriage in the newspapers.

His love had been intense; his suffering was agony. This blow deprived him of all trust in human truth and goodness, and, above all, of all trust in women. If *she* were false, whose soul he thought he had read, and had found there nothing but purity and brightness, where could truth be sought? Yet the effect of this bitter experience upon him was unusual. In general, it is ruinous to the character of a man; for suspicion of evil in others is the destruction of good in ourselves; but Herbert, after the first agony had passed, though he felt a kind of scorn of human nature, yet seemed to look with something of the pity of an angel on the race he despised.

His own dream of life was over; he sickened at the thought of the law; but there arose a hope within him, as he said to his father, "of being able to comfort the poor and the

wretched, now that he knew what suffering was." With almost passionate arguments, he entreated his permission to go into the church, and at last it was given. Since that time, three years had passed, and he now arrived at Ellerton as curate to Mr. Price, who was an old friend of his father's.

Isabel was right. Herbert Grey quickly showed that the young ladies of the place occupied not the least portion of his thoughts. He kept aloof from all society, devoting himself to study, and to unceasing labour among the poor. Even on Miss Shepherd he never called again. Occasionally she and Isabel met him in their walks; but a bow, or, at most, a few hurried words, was all that was exchanged between them. Isabel was disappointed; there was something, not only in his appearance, but far more in his preaching, that interested Isabel—a rigidness of duty—a severity of tone—too great, to many only repelling and despairing (the rankling evil of his one painful experience), but which to her, to whom great

thoughts were as the food of life, was unspeakably attracting. She often shrank from his words; but at the same time they seemed to fill her with new thoughts and feelings. She was disappointed, and yet, even in her disappointment, there was pleasure. She could not have borne that he should go gossiping from house to house, as Mr. Price, good and kind as he was, was in the habit of doing.

It is possible they might have gone on for months without any greater degree of acquaintance, had it not happened that one hot Sunday afternoon Isabel was alone with old Mrs. Shepherd at church. There was but a small congregation, and, such as it was, it consisted principally of old women and children. In the middle of the prayers, Isabel suddenly fainted. There was no one who could assist her, and Herbert Grey, who sat below the reading-desk, before the sermon, himself carried her into the churchyard. Whether he was struck by the extreme beauty and interest of her appearance, as she lay so deadly pale, or whether it was but an act of common courtesy,

cannot now be known; but he called the next day with Mr. Price to inquire after her. Rachel was not at home; Mrs. Shepherd had always a great deal to say to Mr. Price, and Herbert was left to Isabel. She immediately thanked him gratefully for his kindness.

“Don’t speak of it,” he said; “how could I do otherwise? I hope you are not subject to these fainting fits?”

“I have had them before, but not this year; and I had quite forgotten all about them. Mr. Franklin has made me very angry to-day, by forbidding me ever to kneel down; but I can’t obey him, can I?”

“I should think,” said Herbert, gently, “that would be better than what happened yesterday. Will he not forbid your going to church at all, if you are wilful?”

“I am not afraid of that. Aunt Rachel would never think that could be a right thing to do.”

“How very good your aunt seems to be,” said Herbert, after a pause. “She is always employed for others.”

“She is, indeed,” said Isabel, warmly; “she thinks only of doing good.”

“And you, Miss Denison—?” with a slight inquiring smile.

Isabel shook her head. “I am not like my aunt,” she said; “I cannot, I really cannot despise every earthly thing as she does. There seems to me so much that is good and beautiful in the world, and must it all be disregarded? I hope you don’t agree with my aunt, Mr. Grey?”

“No, I don’t think I do,—not, at least, if we remember that the beauty of earth—by which I suppose you mean arts, and what are called accomplishments—are passing things, not made to occupy our hearts.”

“I am not satisfied,” said Isabel; “you call them ‘passing things,’—now it seems to me that whatever is beautiful is far more—that it must have an influence for ever.”

“I am ready, if you are ready, Grey,” called Mr. Price, getting up. Herbert rose immediately.

“Mr. Price has promised to drink tea with

us to-morrow," said Mrs. Shepherd ; " quite a family party. Now, do, Mr. Grey, join us for this once."

" I am afraid I must not break my rule ; though I thank you very much for your invitation." His eye glanced for an instant at Isabel. " Perhaps you will allow me to call in the evening, and walk home with Mr. Price?"

Isabel was singing, when Herbert came in the following evening. Captain Shepherd's parting gift had been an excellent pianoforte, and Mr. Jones, in his flying visits to London, amply provided her with songs and music.

" Come, Isabel, don't stop for Mr. Grey," said Mr. Jones, as she paused ; " begin the song again."

She complied. The air she sung was that beautiful one of Moore's :

" Couldst thou look as dear as when first I sighed for thee."

Her voice was a soft deep contralto, that voice the most capable of expression ; and her sing-

ing, though it possessed none of the brilliancy that masters teach, was touching and beautiful. After the first few lines of the song, a cloud passed over Herbert's face, and, shading his eyes with his hands, he remained buried in thought.

“Capital, Isabel!” exclaimed Mr. Jones, clapping his hands; “you sing better and better, every day. I like these sentimental songs: they make me feel all no-how, and I rather like the feeling. Now, what shall we have next?” He tapped Herbert's shoulder. “What do you say, Mr. Grey?—shall it be sentimental again, or shall we have something to put us into spirits?”

Herbert started from his reverie. “If it were left to my choice, I should ask for the same song again.”

“Oh, no, I can't hear of that! It seems to have given you the blue devils, already. Come, Isabel, you must choose for us,—something to satisfy us all.”

“Here is one,” she said, turning to Mr. Jones, “which I think you have not heard

yet. It is pretty, and not so very melancholy as the last." It was Knight's 'Of what is the old man thinking?'

When the song was finished, Herbert got up, and came towards her. "You are right, Miss Denison; these things do not pass away: some impression they will leave for ever!"

Isabel looked pleased, but made no answer.

"Do you feel like an old man?" he continued, taking up the song and smiling. "You sing as if you did."

"I rather think I do," she answered, laughing; "I never was a very merry child—was I, Aunt Charlotte? I don't remember ever being so noisy as your little things."

"No; but then you were alone, Isabel, and that makes such a difference. I have six," she said, with both a smile and a sigh.

Isabel had looked at her aunt; when she turned her head again, she met Herbert's gaze fixed upon her with an expression almost of sternness. It was as if he sought to read her soul. While she sang, some long-forgotten, happy feeling stirred within him; but, mingling

with it, arose at the same moment the dark and dreary thoughts of doubt and suspicion, which for a time had seemed to sleep.

He turned away : Isabel played a few bars ; then, hastily looking up, asked him if he never sang.

“ Never,” he said, shortly, for there came over him a remembrance of the place and time, when and where he last had sung. A silence followed, and Mr. Price, after saying, as he usually did, that it was the pleasantest evening he had ever spent, rose to leave.

CHAPTER IV.

No, not more welcome the fairy numbers
Of music fall on the sleeper's ear,
When, half awaking from fearful slumbers,
He thinks the full choir of Heaven is near,—
Than came that voice, when, all forsaken,
This heart long had sleeping lain,
Nor thought its cold pulse could ever waken
To such benign blessed sounds again.

MOORE.

From this time Herbert and Isabel met occasionally. That it was occasionally was his fault, but terror as well as love had taken strong possession of his soul, and when one feeling drove him to seek her, the other, with a strange power, withheld him. Still they met occasionally; most often by accident. And when he was actually in her presence, suspicion died away, only, however, to rise more powerfully after each meeting, when

left to the tormenting suggestions of his memory.

One Sunday afternoon, Rachel had been detained in the churchyard by a poor woman; she and Isabel were still there when Mr. Price came out. Offering to walk home with them, he set off with Rachel; Isabel and Herbert followed.

“ Shall you think me very impertinent,” she said, suddenly looking up, after they had walked, as was often the case with them, a great part of the way in silence; “ shall you think me very impertinent, if I ask you something about your sermon?”

“ Not at all,” he said, with the grave, inquiring smile he sometimes fixed on her face; “ far from it.”

“ Ah! but what I have to say is rather impertinent, for it is, in fact, something like finding fault. However, as you give me leave, I will ask you whether you are not rather severe in what you say to us?”

“ Severe?” he asked, with surprise. “ How do you mean?”

“ I mean, that you hold before us so very high a standard of virtue, and yet you give us so little hope, so little encouragement, towards attaining it.”

“ Do you object to a high standard of virtue ?” he said gravely, almost coldly.

“ Oh, how can you think that ? Higher and higher still—to perfection, if I could have my wish.” She spoke with such a glow on her cheek, such an earnest tone in her voice, that it thrilled through Herbert’s heart. “ But then, after all, how very weak human nature is, and I think what I mean is that you scarcely seem to feel for it, to pity it, enough.”

“ I pity suffering and sorrow,” he said, rather gloomily ; “ I have no pity left for weakness and sin.”

“ Perhaps you will think it strange if I say so,” replied Isabel, gently ; “ but I cannot help feeling pity for both weakness and sin.” After a moment’s pause, she added, “ I have reason to feel it.”

They had almost reached the cottage. Herbert stopped, and said, “ I will think of what

you have said. Perhaps I am too severe, but I will say, as you have done, I have reason to be so."

Mr. Price and Rachel had far outstripped them, and stood at the cottage gate. He turned round as they drew near. "I was just telling your aunt, Isabel, that my yearly great dinner is to take place on Thursday. You will all come, of course. It will be your first appearance in the fashionable world, won't it, my dear?" was his parting joke. "You were ill, I think, last year?"

The Shepherds had never mixed much in what little society there was in the place. Rachel was too busy ever to wish for it; old Mrs. Shepherd preferred morning visiting; and the vapid, insipid gossip wearied Isabel to death. They had never, therefore, gone beyond the commonest terms of civility, and it so happened that Isabel had never dined out before. Occasional small tea-parties, given by Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Chapman, had been her utmost dissipation. A few months back she would hardly have given the present

invitation a thought, but now she did think of it, and with pleasure. The chance of meeting Herbert had given an unaccustomed interest to her daily life. Was she then in love with him? No, it was but interest,—she liked to hear his opinions on all subjects, she liked to watch his grave and melancholy countenance when he was silent. Above all, she liked to see that grave countenance change in the sweet peculiar smile which occasionally stole over it. No, it was not love. It was strange, perhaps, that it was not so, but as yet it was but interest.

“How nice you do look, Isabel!” said Mrs. Shepherd, as she came down on the Thursday evening. “I like to see you dressed, my dear.”

“Isabel always looks nice,” said Rachel, gazing at her with a pleased expression; “and yet, I will say for her that she is not the least extravagant in her dress.”

At Mr. Price’s they found a large party assembled,—fourteen or fifteen people. His annual dinner was thought a great deal of,

because, as the young ladies remarked, he always managed to have somebody worth looking at. The somebodies worth looking at on this day were—not Isabel, in her surpassing loveliness, but a Mr. Franklin, the son of the village doctor who lived at some distance,—an officer from a neighbouring town,—a nephew of Mr. Price’s, who had come from London expressly for the occasion—and Herbert Grey, who, as he had not been seen in society before, caused a little sensation.

As Isabel came in, Miss Bridges, the attorney’s daughter, nudged the second Miss Chapman. She was dressed quite simply, in white muslin; her only ornament a locket which hung round her neck, and contained the hair of both her parents. The Miss Chapmans were dressed in yellow *barége*, with a perfect garden of artificial flowers on their heads. Miss Bridges might have sate for the picture of the goddess Iris, attired in all the hues of the rainbow.

“What do you think of Miss Denison?” inquired the latter young lady of Mr. Franklin,

junior, who stood beside her. "She is a handsome girl, certainly; but I can't say I like such large eyes myself; it is not at all like an English girl. I'm sure, if I were her, I should be quite afraid of lifting them up! People might say such things."

"She need not be afraid," said young Franklin; "her eyes are more the eyes of an angel than of a mortal."

"I am glad you think so," replied Miss Bridges; "I always like to hear my own sex admired."

And Herbert, what were his thoughts, as he stood leaning against the chimney-piece? Could they have found words, they might have been such as these. "Was ever living creature so fair, as she who sits before me in her unconscious loveliness? And can it be that falsehood is shrouded in that angel-form?—that the purity and brightness which reign upon her brow are but as deceiving lights?" "No," he answered himself, "I cannot think it." The dark forms of suspicion and distrust were cast away; light had dawned for him

again on earth, for he loved again—he trusted again. The cloud vanished from his brow; and, as he moved towards Isabel, the very expression of his countenance was changed. She remarked the sudden animation and brightness which lit up his face, but had no idea of the cause of that change.

Herbert placed her at the table, having managed to secure her to himself. It was really a fine dinner for Ellerton, and Isabel's eye wandered down the long table in some surprise and some pleasure. Herbert was watching her. "Mr. Price tells me this is quite an unusual party. You have then, I suppose, but little society at Ellerton."

"So little," Isabel answered, "that I never dined out till to-day. There are a good many tea-parties; but they are so tedious, that neither Aunt Rachel nor I can often bear them. We go, for civility, two or three times a-year, otherwise we live quietly at home."

"And you are satisfied with this quiet life," said Herbert, with a smile of pleasure and

admiration. "How few in your position would say the same!"

"I did not say so," said Isabel, laughing and shaking her head. "I am afraid it was you who said so for me. I fear that I am very far from being contented with it. I do long, very much and very often, to see another world than this." A cloud passed over Herbert's face. "I see you are dissatisfied with me," continued she, turning towards him; "but are you not rather hard upon me? Is it not natural that I should wish to see some place besides Ellerton—some people besides these?" and she looked round the table.

"Very natural," said Herbert; but he sighed.

"But these are not my chief reasons," she continued, with hesitation. There was something in Herbert which seemed, almost against her will, to force her to overcome her natural reserve. "My father....Do you know about my father?"

"Mr. Price has mentioned him to me."

"Yes, everybody knows how he has for-

gotten me," said Isabel, sadly; "but he will come back—I know he will—and then"....

"Do you really expect him still?"

"Oh, yes! every day—every day is a fresh disappointment; but I do not despair—I know he will remember me at last."

"Your hope, then," said Herbert, with some surprise, "is that he will claim you—that you will live with him?"

"Yes, I do hope it. Surely, surely, that is not wrong?"

"You wish, then, to leave your aunt—your present life, where you can do so much good—and become, perhaps, a fine London lady?" He spoke with sadness, rather than harshness.

"I think you are rather severe, Mr. Grey," she answered, with great gentleness. "No, I have no wish to be a fine lady, though, perhaps, dreams of a brighter kind of life will sometimes float before my eyes. But....Do you remember the other day, when I said that I *must* pity weakness and sin? But, because I pity, do you suppose I forget it? Do you think I ever forget what my father did, and

can I hope that he will be forgiven till he returns and remembers me?"

She turned away her head, to hide the tears which started in her eyes, and was immediately seized upon by her other neighbour, the young officer, who was very indignant at having been left entirely to Mrs. Chapman, while the beautiful Miss Denison sate by his side. His unceasing rattle continued till dessert was put upon the table, when Isabel took advantage of the intrusion of a long arm between them, to turn a deaf ear to the stream that was murmuring on the other side of the barrier.

Herbert had never spoken: he had been pondering on what she had said, but now immediately resumed the conversation. "You are right, always right," he began; "but still, you own you have dreams of a brighter life. Could nothing, Miss Denison, ever induce you willingly to pass your life in the country—even in a place as dull as Ellerton?" The tone, the look, startled her. For the first time a thrill passed through her heart as she

thought he loved her, a thrill at once of pleasure and alarm.

“ I think you still mistake me,” she answered, with some hesitation. “ I don’t fancy that I could ever bear to live very long in a town. It was of people, not of places, that I spoke—or, at least, I think my curiosity about places would very soon be satisfied.”

“ People, not places,” he repeated. “ If, then, it were possible that you could love in the country”—and he fixed his eyes on her as he spoke—“ the country, even Ellerton, might satisfy you ?”

His look embarrassed her—such a grave, piercing, meaning look. She slightly blushed, then laughed it off.

“ You really have catechized me very severely to-night, and I have been very good to answer so many questions. You ought to be afraid of my retaliating. Will you answer me if I begin to question you ?”

“ If you please,” he said, rather sadly ; “ but I am afraid that my examination will not interest you.”

“ Oh, yes, it will indeed. One thing will interest me very much, if you will really answer me.” She paused a moment to consider if her question was an indiscreet one; then, notwithstanding a secret warning that it was so, boldly asked it. “ Do you remember your telling me, the other day, that you had reasons for being severe on human nature?”

“ Yes, I remember it, and it is true,” he said, and his brow clouded over as he spoke. “ I have reasons for thinking ill of human nature, which it will take much to make me forget.”

Isabel looked up inquiringly, but was afraid to speak. Herbert read her countenance. “ You wish to ask me what they are?” he said.

“ Yes, I should like to hear them, if you have no objection—if it is not painful to you to tell me.”

“ It *is* painful,” he said; “ but I will tell you some day, if you will listen to me. Perhaps, however,” he continued, sadly, “ you will not wish to do so, when I say that the

condition must be to hear another history at the same time?"

There was a silence. Isabel did not answer, but involuntarily glanced at Mrs. Shepherd an imploring glance to beg her to move. Mrs. Shepherd took the hint, and led the way into the drawing-room. Isabel followed as in a dream; and, unconscious of what she did, walked to the window, and, looking out into the dusky twilight, pondered on what had passed. She was not very much in love, perhaps, but that strange thrill of pleasure had shot through her heart which is felt when first a girl knows herself beloved. She was aroused from her reverie by the voice of Miss Laura Chapman. "Do you admire Mr. Grey, Miss Denison?" Isabel felt her incivility, and hurriedly sate down with the young ladies, who had clustered together, but forgot to answer the question. It was repeated.

"Do you admire Mr. Grey, Miss Denison? Matilda Bridges says she thinks nothing of him."

"I think him very handsome, if you mean

that. I should have thought that even those who disliked him must allow it."

"What should make you think I dislike Mr. Grey?" said Miss Bridges, sharply. "I'm sure I never said so. Has he been complaining of me?"

"Oh, no," said Isabel, laughing, as she thought how far from Miss Bridges had been their conversation; "I did not mean *you*, particularly; I dare say you like him very much," she added, rather maliciously.

"I like him? I'm very sure I never trouble my head about him."

Isabel made no further answer, but, anxious to atone for her former incivility, turned to the elder Miss Chapman.

"How very early you get up, Miss Chapman; I saw you practising this morning as we went by your window at eight o'clock."

"Oh, it was quite a chance! Papa was going to a place a good way off, and wanted to be back for this dinner, so he was up early, and I got up to breakfast with him. How came you to be out walking at that time?"

“ My Aunt Charlotte’s baby was christened this morning, and we went to breakfast there before the christening. I was a godmother for the first time, and I feel very respectable in consequence.”

“ Was your godchild called Isabel ?”

“ No; I was rather offended about it. Mr. Jones said Isabel was too fine or too foreign for his little girl. It was called Sarah-Jane—not very pretty.”

“ No, what a pity! I do like pretty names, and mine is so ugly. There, you are Isabel, which is quite beautiful, and there is Laura, and Miss Bridges has a very sweet name, Matilda, and I am only Elizabeth !”

“ You should console yourself,” said Isabel, smiling, “ by thinking how much greater a name you have. Remember Queen Elizabeth.”

“ Very true—I had forgotten that.”

“ I believe, Matilda was a Queen, as well as Elizabeth,” remarked Miss Bridges, drily.

The time, a long and weary time, passed, till the gentlemen came into the drawing-

room. Miss Bridges then returned to good humour till later in the evening, when Mr. Price approached, and asked her to sing.

She gave a slight cough, and said, she was very sorry, but she was so hoarse.

“Come, Miss Bridges,” he persisted, “pray, sing; I never knew a young lady who, when she was asked to sing, did not say she was hoarse. Pray, favour us.”

“Really, Mr. Price, I should be very happy to sing, but you must hear how altered my voice is.”

He turned from her, much to her disgust, as she had expected another and more pressing entreaty, to which she had intended to yield. He next applied to the Miss Chapmans: but they could not sing without their book.

“Then you, my dear Isabel, must sing for them all; I’m sure *you* won’t refuse me?”

She smiled, and went at once to the piano-forte. Miss Bridges winked to the Miss Chapmans, and whispered very audibly to young Franklin—“Very modest, to be sure!”

Isabel began with the “Battle of the Baltic,”

Mr. Price's especial favourite, for which he beat time on the back of her chair, to Herbert's great irritation. Mr. Jones soon however begged for something more sentimental, and she sang with much expression, "The wreath of roses," which had been but lately published. It was received, as usual, with "rapturous applause."

"Now, that is what I call singing," said Mr. Franklin to Miss Bridges. "How much better that is than the outlandish songs some people sing! I could listen to Miss Denison for ever."

"I can't say I agree with you; I'm not partial to English songs myself, and I believe you, Mr. Franklin, are singular in your admiration."

"Am I?" he said, looking round the room. "See how our partner's rapt"—(Mr. Franklin was a quoter of Shakespeare)—pointing to Herbert, who sate indeed buried in thought, behind Isabel's chair. "*He* rather likes English singing, I imagine." Miss Bridges smiled scornfully. "I see what you mean," he added,

(for he was too good-natured ever to think of bad passions,)—"you think there are other feelings there besides love of music. I believe you are right—it had struck me at dinner to-day."

"Indeed, Mr. Franklin, I'm quite in the dark. What feelings do you allude to? If you suppose Mr. Grey to be in love with Miss Denison, I can contradict such an idea with authority."

"Indeed!" he said, with some surprise. "Well, I'm usually wrong when I take to match-making."

Mrs. Shepherd remained the last of the party. She never held much to the proverb, that "Enough is as good as a feast," but was rather of opinion that you could not have too much of a good thing. Mr. Price approached Isabel, before they took leave, and warmly thanked her for her singing.

"You have given me a great deal of pleasure, my dear; I hope, therefore, that you have enjoyed yourself as well?"

"I have, indeed," she said; "I cannot tell

you how much." Her beautiful face certainly expressed pleasure. Herbert saw it, and his melancholy brow cleared at the sight. He approached her.

"I have formed a new opinion," she said, looking up at him with a smile, "and that is, that I think it would be a good thing if the neighbourhood met more frequently in this way. I think it might do a great deal towards putting an end to little jealousies and foolish gossip. What do you think?"

He smiled, but shook his head.

Herbert and Isabel both required the lesson, that the law of perfect charity does not extend to the very poor alone.

CHAPTER V.

..... I,
Beyond the limit of all else i' the world,
Do love, prize, honour you.

SHAKESPEARE.

It is in vain that we would coldly gaze
On those that smile on us. The heart must
Leap kindly back to kindness.

BYRON.

It was about three weeks after Mr. Price's dinner, that Isabel was walking home one afternoon with Mrs. Jones's eldest little girl, who had been spending the day with her.

Amy was a bright little creature, and a great favourite of her cousin's; and now, as they walked along the high road together, Isabel, with her dark and stately beauty, and the rosy little girl, with her blue eyes and golden hair, they were really a pretty sight,

and attracted the pleased admiration of many a passer-by.

They walked along, in animated conversation, till their attention was somewhat arrested by the appearance of three young men on horseback, strangers; two of whom were talking with great eagerness as they passed Isabel. The third was a few yards behind them, and was engaged in reading a letter. As he too passed, he folded it up, and awkwardly dropped it on the ground, instead of into his pocket. A gust of wind blew it to Isabel's feet. He turned his horse round. She picked up the letter, and returned a few steps, holding the little girl's hand, to give it to him. He jumped from his horse to receive it, bowed and smiled as he thanked her — for an instant, only an instant, fixed his eyes on her beautiful face, and rode after his companions. He was not strikingly handsome, but had one of those faces with a peculiar sweetness of expression, half smiling, half thoughtful, which are often more engaging than a greater degree of beauty.

Isabel felt pleased with the incident; two or three times during her visit to Mrs. Jones, she found herself thinking of it; haunted, almost unconsciously, by the stranger's bright, expressive smile.

Late in the afternoon, she walked home through the fields. The days were shortening, and the evenings generally chilly, but this was one of those soft autumn days which, perhaps from her Spanish blood, she peculiarly enjoyed. She wandered slowly on, and her mind reverted to a subject which was now often in her thoughts. It was one on which she felt she must very soon come to a decided opinion—whether or not she loved Herbert Grey? She had asked herself this question very often since Mr. Price's dinner, and the answer she received varied from time to time. She thought she did; she was almost sure she did; but still, sometimes, a doubt came over her; something within suggested, "Is this such love as I have read of? Would it break my heart if I thought he did not love me?" In his presence, indeed, every doubt died away.

But, when she was alone again, doubts would return ; and, though her inward questionings almost always ended satisfactorily, in thinking that people were different, that all could not feel alike, that she certainly did love him ; yet, day after day, “ that restless thing, the human heart,” would suggest that the point was still open for discussion. The day before this one, she had very much satisfied herself by looking backwards and forwards, seeing how changed her life was, how far brighter than it had been the year before ; and, still more, by remarking how contentedly she could now look on to a future at Ellerton ; and yet, again, as she now walked along, she was questioning and arguing with herself. The discussion was, however, soon interrupted by Herbert coming towards them. Her heart beat, and her cheeks glowed, and, as usual, doubts were forgotten.

“ Are you going to Mr. Jones’s ?” she inquired, as they met.

“ No, Miss Denison ; I came to meet you.” He looked thoughtful, and she trembled for what might be coming.

“ How did you know that I was here ? ” she asked, smilingly.

“ I met Miss Shepherd, who told me so ; and gave me leave to come and meet you ; otherwise ” . . . he paused, and Isabel began talking very fast about her visit, and the children ; but, to all she said, his answers were so short and *distract*, that at last her powers were exhausted, and they walked on in silence.

At length he began. The tone of his voice told her at once what was coming ; and why did her heart sink, and her pulse almost stand still within her ? Did she, or did she not, love Herbert Grey ?

“ It is now more than three weeks since I promised that I would tell you my sad history, when you asked me for it. Has all interest died away within you ? Shall you never think about it again ? ”

“ If it is so painful,” Isabel began, with hesitation

“ It is painful,” he interrupted ; “ painful and sad ; but is this the reason for your

silence?—is it not rather that you shrink from the condition I affixed?”

Isabel was silent.

“Isabel,” he continued, “why don’t you answer me? But it is too late now to wait for an answer—you know, you must know well, how wildly, how passionately I love you; and you must hear me speak, and then. . . .” He paused, and looked in her face. It was white as marble. “Forgive me, Miss Denison; I have been very wrong. I will tell you all calmly, if you will hear me. Will you hear me now, or shall it be for another time?”

It was really an effort to her to speak, but she did speak, and begged him to tell her all. He began again, in a low but calm voice.

“I have loved, Miss Denison, before now. Do not start,” he said, observing a movement which sent a thrill of pleasure through his heart, as he fancied it might be a pang of jealousy. “I thought at that time that I loved as few could love, but now I find that even I knew it not.”

With breathless interest Isabel listened to the tale he told—the tale of his love, of his hope, of his agony when forsaken. Breathless, agitated, she listened still, when he ended thus:—

“ It was no light thing to suffer this, the disappointment of every hope ; but the suffering itself was as nothing in comparison to the blight it cast upon me ; the doubt in the truth of every human being under which I have now suffered for many years. Even you, Miss Denison, in whose face truth and purity are written -- even you at first I doubted. But it is passed—it is all passed. In your presence, better feelings have come back to me ; and never, even under disappointment, will they leave me again. And now you know all, and all my happiness is in your hands.” He tried to speak calmly, and paused as again he became agitated.

Isabel was silent still. If she could have known what her silence cost him, she would have spoken at once ; but she dreamed not of the powerful emotions which were stirring

in his breast. Her own heart beat, indeed, but it was with doubt, with fear, with bashfulness, with excitement; she hung not on his words as if happiness or misery, almost life or death, were in the balance.

He still tried to be calm, but the words burst from him, "Oh, Isabel! speak to me. Do not fear to tell me the truth. If you cannot love me, if you cannot even hope to love me, doubtless I shall find strength to bear it; only speak to me, but one word!"

"I did not speak," she said at last, in her low, sweet tone, "because I could not. I did not know if my love was worthy of yours. I hardly know now. It is not like yours; it is not enough; but....I think...." The words died away, but she looked up at him and smiled, and placed her hand in his.

They reached the cottage. "May I come in?" asked Herbert.

"No, not to-night. To-morrow, as early as you please."

Isabel walked into the drawing-room, where Rachel sate alone. She put her arms round

her aunt's neck, and kissed her. " Shall you like me to leave you, aunt Rachel?"

" Oh, Isabel! Is it so, indeed? Even I did not know what you felt for Mr. Grey."

" Nor did I know; nor do I know now; only I think I am happy—very happy."

CHAPTER VI.

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the greensward. Nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself,
Too noble for this place.

Winter's Tale.

It was about eight o'clock, on a cold gusty evening, at the latter end of October, that a stranger got off the London coach, which stopped at the door of the Swan inn at Ellerton.

Being a coach traveller, and with little luggage, he was shown into the commercial room.

“Can I not have a room to myself, waiter?” he said, rather impatiently.

“Oh, certainly, sir! This way, if you please; two steps, sir.” He was shown into a comfortable room, with a blazing fire. “Do you sleep here to-night, sir?”

“ Yes. And let me have a good fire in my bed-room, for it is horribly cold.” And he thrust his stiffened fingers almost into the grate. “ Be quick with some dinner. What can I have.”

“ Chops, sir ?”

“ Yes. Have you any fish ?”

“ A few herrings, sir,” said the waiter, with increasing respect.

“ Well, let me have some fish, and some sherry, or some good beer, if you have any, and you may settle the rest as you please.”

The waiter proceeded to the kitchen. “ Do your best, missus; this is a real gentleman, who cares no more for a pound than nothink.”

“ Who’ve we got here, Dick ?” shouted the landlady to her husband. “ Sam says he’s a real gentleman.”

“ Has he got any luggage, Sam ?”

“ Only a bag, sir, and he carried that himself; but he’s a real gentleman, that I can see, and he cares no more for expense than nothink.”

“ I’ll go up with his dinner myself. I knows

a real gentleman, that I does. If he's a real gentleman, he'll ask me to take a drop. Many's the one has done it before now. Draw the best beer, Sam, and take care the chops are tender, Doll."

The landlord went into the room with the dinner, and from a gentleman he was soon raised to be a nobleman in his estimation; for immediately saying he hated to dine alone, the stranger begged his host to bear him company. The landlord was nothing loth, and sat down to a second dinner, as, had the offer been made to him, he would have sate down to a third, with an appetite undiminished and undiminishable.

"Have you much business, landlord?" began the stranger; "this seemed a quiet place, as well as I could see in the dark."

"Well, it is a quiet place, sir; but we does a good bit in the way of business—what with travellers halways, and hunting in the winter, and picnicing in the summer, we sees a good many new faces. I had two lords here one night last winter, sir. I thinks as how I

have a third now? I drinks your lordship's health."

"No, my good friend, no lordship; but I drink your health, and success to the Swan Inn, at Ellerton. I suppose you have balls here in the winter, when the country is full?"

"No, sir, we haven't much of a hopping gentry about here; a good many young girls and very few of the other sort, sir. It's a dull place, Ellerton is; and if it warn't for the fine travellers, I often think I should be off, sir. And it's a pity, too, for we have the beautifullest young lady here, that hever your heyes did see...."

"Indeed!—who may she be?"

"Why, she's an horphant, sir, or as good as an horphant, for all she sees of her father; though some do say he's living yet. I've been in the Ingies, sir, and I've been in Amerikay, but never did I see—no, nor in Lon'on neither—the likes of her."

"What did you say was this country beauty's name?"

“Such black hyes, sir—oh my! I often says to Dolly—Dolly’s my wife, sir—‘Dolly,’ says I, ‘your hyes does for the likes of me, but if I was a young gentleman, I wouldn’t be content, no, not I, without a pair of hyes like those of Miss Isabel Denison.’”

There was a pause, and the landlord rose to go.

“Well,” said the stranger, laughing, “I shouldn’t mind having a wife myself. Where can I see this beauty of yours?”

“Why, at church, sir, to-morrow, as sure as a gun. She’s a kind of a saint or a hangel, and she hasn’t missed divine service since she was a hinfant so high; and it’s not many of us poor sinful creatures as can say the same. I won’t tell you no more, sir. You’d pick her out of hall Lon’on. I’ll send you some tea, and much obliged, sir.”

The stranger threw himself back in his chair, put his legs on the fender, and remained for some time in deep thought.

The church bells had scarcely begun to ring for morning service on the following day, when

he left the inn, Mrs. Dolly remarking, as she saw him set off, "A real gentleman, Sam, and religious, too; see how he goes decent-like to be first at church."

A few old women and the clerk were the only people assembled when the stranger entered, and he stood for some minutes in the aisle. The clerk then offered him a seat, and he watched, with an anxiety and impatience not to be described, the gathering of the congregation. Once or twice, an observer might have seen him start as a gay bonnet appeared in the doorway; but the expression of interest again and again faded away. Intent, however, as he seemed on the congregation, his eye was for a moment diverted and arrested by the figure of Herbert Grey, as, following Mr. Price from the vestry, he entered and knelt down within the altar. His noble and striking appearance in that village church surprised him. The one moment that his eye was caught, three figures came in by a side door, and took their seats near that of the stranger. On one of these, his attention was

immediately fixed. She was a tall, slight girl, very simply dressed; but, although he could not see her face, there was an indescribable grace in her gestures, which convinced him that she was the object of his search. His nervous excitement increased, but she never once during the service moved her head.

Wandering, however, as were his thoughts, when Herbert went into the pulpit, and his deep, earnest voice was heard, the stranger's attention was caught, gradually was fixed, and, as he owned to himself, almost for the first time in his life he listened with interest to a sermon. The text was from Deuteronomy, "Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end."

Often before had Herbert exhorted the people to a consideration of their latter end; but, to a close observer, on this day the tone of his preaching was changed. He seemed no more the severe monitor, but the affectionate father of his flock. A change might also have

been remarked on his countenance, as if some deep oppression, some dark cloud, had passed away. If such change there were, it was, however, unremarked save by one; but its effect was felt. Never had Herbert's words made so deep an impression as they did that day.

The service was over; the stranger leaned upon the pew, and his whole soul was in the gaze he fixed on the figure before him. At last she moved; it was perhaps the force of that earnest gaze which compelled her to look round. She started—her colour changed—once again she looked, then followed her companions into the churchyard.

“How pale you look, my dear!” said Mrs. Shepherd, as they walked home; “it *was* close, though, and I thought there was an unpleasant smell. I felt queer myself once.”

“You do look pale,” said Rachel; “what is the matter, Isabel?”

“Am I pale, Aunt Rachel? I didn't know it. I am quite well. I had a foolish fancy

for a minute," she continued, in a low voice; "but it is nothing. Did you see a stranger at church?"

"No; at least, I observed no one in particular."

The stranger was still in Isabel's mind when she went to church in the afternoon. He was not there on first going in, and she felt both relieved and disappointed; but again, as she left the church, she encountered that earnest, scutinizing gaze, and her cheek was deadly pale, when her aunt again addressed her—

"Now, my dear Isabel, what is the matter? what is this foolish fancy which is to make you look like a ghost?"

"I know it is very foolish—I feel it is impossible—but I cannot help it; I fancied it might be....my father!"

It was almost the first time she had ever mentioned that name to Rachel.

"Dear Isabel, when so many strangers pass through Ellerton, why should it be? You must not be so fanciful, my dear child. You

will have no peace in life, if you indulge your imagination in this way."

Isabel made no answer, and they walked home. They stood for a few minutes in the cottage garden, and Mrs. Shepherd, leaning on the wall, spoke to some of the passers-by. Suddenly Isabel seized Rachel's arm. "Look, Aunt Rachel, there he is!" said she. The stranger passed, earnestly fixed his gaze on her face, and then, as if in atonement for his incivility, took off his hat.

"My dear child, you are nineteen, and that young man cannot be more than twenty-seven. How can you be so foolish?"

"But why, then, should he look at me so earnestly?"

Rachel smiled. "Few girls beside you would ask such a question, Isabel." It was the nearest approach to a compliment that Miss Shepherd had ever paid her charge.

Isabel, however, was not satisfied, and her mind dwelt for some days upon the incident, till her attention was diverted by her parting with Herbert. His father was taken sud-

denly ill, and he required the care of his son. It was now that she first fully felt his value—first found how wonderful was the change in her feelings since his arrival at Ellerton.

CHAPTER VII.

Although the day be never so long,
At last it ringeth to even song.

Old Rhyme.

It was above nineteen years since he had left England, when Captain, now Mr. Denison, (for he had left the army,) again set his foot upon his native soil. He came back an altered man. He had left his country in the reckless, thoughtless, selfishness of manhood;—he returned, grave, sober, stern, it may be, selfish still, but selfish in a more subtle form. He left it comparatively in poverty, he came back a millionaire. He left it flying from a despised, but loved and beautiful wife; and he came back, bringing with him a wife young and fair, honoured and loved, but not as he had loved the wife of his youth. Few would

have traced the gay young officer in the grave, noble-looking, respected Mr. Denison, who returned to take his place among his former friends and contemporaries, in his native land.

When Captain Denison parted from his wife, it was really with bitter sorrow, but he reasoned with himself that he had acted foolishly, and must suffer for it; and soon, very soon, reasoning was needed no more. He consoled himself;—to all intents and purposes, though she occasionally crossed his path a vision of beauty, Amy was forgotten. The voyage, the arrival in India, his duties, his amusements, his companions, filled his mind. “Men have all these resources,” and Amy was forgotten.

It was about a year after he had deserted her, that he was sitting one day in a reading-room at Calcutta, with several young men of his acquaintance. He was bending over a table, deeply engaged in writing, when a young man approached him with a smiling face, and tapped him on the shoulder. “I congratulate you, George; you’ve got a daughter!”

Captain Denison started, then impatiently pushed him away.—“What a fool you are, Harris! Why do you disturb me?”

“Nay, but look,” persisted the young man; “I am sure it is quite as great a surprise to me as it seems to be to you, for I never even heard a rumour of your marriage, but this is plain enough:—‘The wife of Captain George Denison, of a daughter, at Ellerton, on the 10th instant.’”

Captain Denison affected to laugh, and took the newspaper from the hands of his friend, who, laughing also, sate down again. A few moments afterwards he saw Denison rise and dart from the room, and, catching a hasty glance at his face, he saw that it was white as ashes.

Harris was discreet, and fond of Denison. He picked up the newspaper, which had fallen to the ground, and, without saying a word, looked on. Among the deaths recorded on the same day, he saw the following:—“At Ellerton, on the 10th instant, Mrs. George Denison, aged 19.”

Captain Harris pondered for some time on this strange occurrence; but he saw, whatever the history might be, that it was a secret connection of his friend's, with which he had no concern; and, putting up the newspaper which had attracted his own attention, to secure this one, at least, from the eyes and observations of others, he left the room, in hopes of meeting with Denison again. He went to his room that day, and the next, and the next; but was steadily refused admittance. The third day, Captain Denison reappeared, pale indeed, as with recent suffering, and in deep mourning, but in manner and spirits much as usual. On their first meeting, his eyes met those of Harris, and plainly enough said, "Ask me no questions." For the rest, it all passed unnoticed by his companions, with the exception of a casual inquiry made of Harris, "who on earth Denison was in such deep mourning for?"

Years passed away, and Captain Denison became a distinguished officer; and, from circumstances needless to detail, but not un-

common in India, riches flowed in upon him, and still he claimed not, thought not, of his child. In the first moments of agony, indeed, when Amy, in all her grace, and beauty, and affection, was recalled, he had determined to seek at once the child she had left him; and, had it been a boy, it is most probable he would have done so. But when these first moments of remorse were over, he reasoned again,—“What can I do here with a girl? She is far safer and happier where she is.” And when this had been repeated once or twice, the question was settled. A few letters were begun to Miss Shepherd, commending the child to her care, but these, too, on second thought, were thrown aside—it was better to leave the case as it was—he might only raise expectation never to be realized. When he returned to England, if he ever did, he would claim her, and then his love should make amends for all.

And years passed away, and Captain Denison married again, a beautiful girl whom he met with in India, the daughter of a General

Courteney. Seven years after their marriage, rich, respected, but childless, he returned with her to England and to his father's house. How many had passed away from that home since he had left it twenty years before in the reckless thoughtlessness of youth!

A few days after his return, he sat one morning early in his dressing-room. He was engaged in writing, and his look was graver even than was usual. There was a knock at the door, and a young man looked in.

"Good morning, George. I was just going down to my chambers, and your man—what's-his-name, Finch—told me that you wanted particularly to speak to me. Can I do anything for you, down my way?" he continued, swinging the door in his hand.

"Oh, no, I wanted to speak to you. Pray shut the door and come in. It is so cold here;" and he shivered.

"I suppose you feel the climate," said the young man, coming slowly in. Charles Denison had not been a week in his brother's company without learning to stand in awe of him.

He now wished himself at Jericho, or any other out-of-the-way place in the world, rather than where he was. "What can he want me for?" he repeated over and over again, as, after he had seated himself, a dead silence followed. A bright thought flashed across his mind. "Perhaps he is going to give me some money!"

Mr. Denison got up, and began walking about the room. "I wanted to speak to you, Charles—pray sit down again, I'm so uncommonly cold this morning....Have you breakfasted?"

"No. Have you?"

"My breakfast is just coming. Emmeline is not well this morning. You shall have some too." He rang the bell till it broke.—"Finch, Mr. Charles Denison will breakfast with me. What do you drink, Charles? Chocolate, I suppose, the family beverage?"

Charles nodded, the door closed, and Mr. Denison resumed his walk.

"I wanted to speak to you, Charles, about a matter of my own." The young man looked

relieved. "What a bore the light is! my eyes can't bear it." He hurriedly drew down the blinds, though it was a dull October day, and the windows looked north, and again paced up and down the room.

Suddenly he came and stood before his brother, and began speaking very quickly.— "I don't suppose you are aware, Charles, that I was married before now?" Charles opened his eyes to their widest extent. "You need not stare so, Charles," he said, impatiently; "I say I was married many years ago, to a curate's daughter, in the country." He paused.

"She isn't alive, George?" said the young lawyer, looking aghast, as the visions of a trial for bigamy flitted before his eyes.

"Alive?—Why, what do you take me for? Alive," he repeated, in a lower voice, as he walked restlessly up and down, "no;—poor Amy!" He passed his hand over his eyes, and was silent for some minutes; then began again.

"Well, Charles, I married, as I said, many years ago. I was a brute then, and I soon

left my wife and went to India. Some months afterwards, I found that I had a daughter, and that *she* was dead." Again he paused.

"Is your daughter alive?" asked the young man, timidly.

"I don't know. I never inquired, from that day to this. I thought she would be better taken care of, where she was. I tell you, I was a brute then, but now I should like to hear of her, and I wish that you should manage it for me. I will give you all directions: will you go and see her, under a false name? See if she lives, and see what she is like? If she is an awkward, vulgar girl, I will own her, that I have determined to do at any rate, and I will give her a large fortune; but I will not have her to live with me. It would be false kindness—it would be too late for me to begin to love her, under such circumstances. If she is ladylike—I must use a word I hate, I don't care about beauty—but if she is ladylike, it is enough. You may then go to her from me, or, perhaps not. Come back to me, with your opinion. If she is

worthy of it, I will go and humble myself to her family, for her sake. Do you understand me, Charles? Will you undertake the journey, and perform it discreetly? I will trust it entirely to you."

"Willingly," answered the young man. "I will go to-morrow. Sunday will be a good day to see her, without being seen myself."

"Yes, a very good idea; and to-morrow night make inquiries at the inn, about her character. I leave it all to you. Good bye; it was a bad business," and he sighed; "but don't hate me for it." The brothers shook hands, and Charles took leave.

"What a strange story!" thought he, as he went down the steps. "I don't half like it. Neglecting the child, too, all these years! Why, she must be twenty, I suppose. By the bye, I never got any breakfast, after all!"

The result of Charles Denison's journey has been related in the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mais, non, je garde une espérance,
Car elle a dit "je reviendrai."

Romance.

The report of Charles Denison to his brother made him determine to lose no time in claiming his long-neglected child. But, as the moment drew near, his promised personal humiliation to the Shepherds became more and more obnoxious to him. He dreaded it; he dreaded the sight of Ellerton, and all the familiar scenes of his wanderings with Amy;—he dreaded, too, the excitement it must cause to his own feelings; and, though he was far from being without good qualities, his character had not that nobleness which gladly endures pain, if, enduring, it can in any way atone for error.

He had a great deal to undergo in owning his child—in making known to his wife his family, his friends, his early marriage; and he told the truth—he made no false story—he was above that; but he was willing to spare himself where it was possible; and, excusing himself under the plea of its being necessary that he should remain with his wife, who, never very strong, had, on arriving in England, caught rather an alarming cold, he determined that all the necessary communications should be made in writing, and that, having prepared them, Charles Denison should return and bring his daughter to London.

He wrote to Miss Shepherd, enclosing a letter to Isabel. To the former he did not spare himself; he did the fullest justice to Amy, and professed to be willing to receive all the reproaches her sister could lavish upon him.

They were sitting at breakfast in the cottage about ten days after Charles Denison's visit to Ellerton. The letters were brought

in, and Isabel was soon intent on one she received from Herbert. One was given to Miss Shepherd — she opened it, started, scarcely restrained herself from an exclamation—hastily glanced at Isabel, then refolded it, and put it into her pocket. When Isabel looked up, her face was calm and quiet as usual.

“What news of Herbert?” she asked, with a smile.

“General Grey is almost well again. It was an attack of gout; and Herbert says he shall be here on Saturday, unless there should be a relapse; but I don’t think that is likely, is it, Mrs. Shepherd?”

“No, my dear, I don’t think it is; but I never had much gout myself, nor Shepherd either, so I don’t understand much about it; but, when a thing is gone, my dear, why it is gone, you know: and it does not seem quite right to be expecting it back again. So, upon the whole, I think Herbert will come. And has he told his father the good news, my dear?”

“No, aunt,” said Rachel. “You know it

is not to be mentioned to anybody for a month or two."

"Very true, my dear Rachel; I remember now. I'm glad I asked the question, for I had almost forgotten that, and I was just thinking I should have a little talk with Mr. Price about it: but I remember now, and so I'm glad I happened to ask the question, for sometimes I do forget a little."

The moment breakfast was over, Rachel shut herself up in her room, to read Mr. Denison's letter; and the calm, self-possessed woman wept tears of agony, as the passionate expressions of the repentant father and husband recalled to her mind the sister of her youth. Many and many had been the pangs of self-reproach with which Rachel had been visited regarding Amy. Many and many a time had the thought presented itself, that, but for her own disregard of her feelings, her sister's fault would never have been committed; for after-years of thought and experience had taught her that, however great may be the duty of ministering to the wants

of the poor and needy, that duty is seldom well performed when performed at the expense of those ties which God himself has made.

But feelings with Rachel were never long indulged, and she went about her usual morning tasks, that there might be no ungovernable emotion, no traces even of agitation when she broke the news to Isabel. She felt instinctively (although she had never yet seen her niece under the influence of great excitement, the course of her love having been smooth indeed) that her own calmness would be needed.

It was about one o'clock when she returned home, for her important and somewhat difficult task. She stopped for a moment at the window of the little drawing-room. Isabel was bending over the table, writing to Herbert; and Rachel stood and gazed upon her beauty, and, for the first time, something like pride arose in her mind, as she dwelt on what a father's feelings would be when such a treasure was consigned to his arms! And

this treasure, rich as Isabel might be in natural grace, she could not but feel that *she* had in some degree prepared for him.

She walked slowly into the room, and sate down opposite to her niece. Though perfectly calm, there was something unusually thoughtful and tender in her expression, and Isabel was struck by it.

“What *is* the matter, aunt Rachel?—why do you look so strangely at me?”

“I was thinking of you, Isabel—of parting from you. I was fancying that time, when our home will no longer be gladdened by your presence.”

“But you know you are not to think of that as yet. It will not be for a long, long time; and I, at least, will not think of the evil day till it comes!”

“I was not thinking of your marriage, Isabel,” replied her aunt, gravely. “Is there no other event which might separate us?”

Isabel fixed her large eyes wonderingly on her aunt.

“ If your father should claim you, my child, must I not resign you to him ?”

“ My father !” she said, starting from her seat. “ Aunt Rachel, you have heard from him ! You would not.....you could not.....” she pressed her hand on her beating heart— “ I knew, I knew he would come !” and, turning away, she hid her face in her hands.

Miss Shepherd’s answer was to present her with Mr. Denison’s letter. It contained only the following lines, but no passionate expressions of love or penitence could have touched her heart so deeply as those simple words.

“ My Child, — After so many years of neglect, can you love your father still ?”

“ GEORGE DENISON.”

The colour which had overspread her face ebbed away ; her cheek deadly pale, her eye fixed, almost stupefied — she stood gazing on the words. That moment so longed for was come at last !

Miss Shepherd became alarmed at her appearance ; to rouse her, she got up, and

tenderly kissed her. "Did I not say truly, my own child, Isabel, that we must part?"

Her words, her voice, with its tone of unwonted emotion, turned the current of Isabel's feelings: and, burying her face on the table, she burst into a torrent of tears—the wildest tears she ever had shed, in childhood or in youth.

Miss Shepherd placed her own letter on the table before her, and left the room.

After a time, Mrs. Shepherd burst open the door, but her exclamations of astonishment—"Well, to be sure! Well, I never expected this! Well, I always did think he would come!" were stilled at Isabel's appearance. She contented herself with kissing her, and asking a few desultory questions, and then walked away to finish her exclamations to Rachel if she would hear them; or, if not, in solitude. But Isabel was roused, and, seeing the letter which her aunt had left for her, she seized it and hurried to her room.

It was more than two hours afterwards that Rachel went to her, as the post-time

drew near. She had written her own letter to Mr. Denison—a kind, even affectionate one; and, in answer to his inquiry as to when she would be willing to let Isabel go to him, she had named a week. It was but a little while to prepare herself to part with her only earthly treasure; but she often dreamed that there were depths in her niece's mind, depths of feeling which she had no power to fathom; and she feared for her alike—a long parting with Ellerton, or a long waiting for the sight of her father. She thought a week would be enough for the first, and sufficient to prevent any restless agitation in the expectation of the other.

She now opened the door of Isabel's room, and found her like a lily after a storm—so pale, so crushed—her long hair drenched with her tears. “My dear Isabel, why this?”

She smiled through her still falling tears, and shook her head.

“This must not be,” said her aunt, gently. “I have always thought that you could control your feelings, as I have tried to teach

you to do ; but perhaps it has been because, as yet, you have never much been tried. You must have more self-command ;—your future life may be very different from the quiet past, and you don't know how necessary it may be to your happiness to have the control of your feelings. I will not blame you now, my dear child ; but will you remember, as my last advice, that a woman, especially, can never yield much to the indulgence of her own feelings without falling into the worst kind of selfishness."

Rachel spoke gravely. Self-command was one of her highest virtues, nor was she very far wrong in her estimate of its value. Her quiet tone calmed Isabel.

"I have written to your father, and I came to see if your letter was ready. I will put it up for you ; and now, my dear Isabel, I must desire that you will go out walking. I have a message to send across the heath—you shall take it for me. Put on your bonnet and your warm cloak, for, though the sun is shining, it is very cold."

The emotions of that day completely exhausted Isabel. She fell into a kind of apathy which astonished and distressed herself. Neither the long-cherished hope of seeing her father, nor the dread of parting with her aunt—now far dearer than ever—seemed to have any power to arouse her. Yet, painful as such stupor must always be, it was well in this case that it came upon her, for the thoughts alike of the future and of the past would have been too much for her deep feeling and her excitable imagination.

On first hearing the news, Herbert would have flown to spend with Isabel the last week at Ellerton—the last week, something whispered within his heart, of his own happiness; but a return of his father's illness made it impossible to leave him, and it was not till the very day before Isabel's departure that they met again.

He arrived at Ellerton about the middle of the day; and, after sitting a little while in the cottage, he asked her to take a last walk with him. They left the house together,

and their mutual feelings led them to the path along the fields where they had had their first explanation. The air was bitterly cold, but they scarcely felt it. "The tempest in the mind doth from the senses take all feeling else, save what beats there."

They walked at first in silence. Herbert delayed to speak what yet he had determined should be said, and Isabel had no words. Calm, but unutterable sadness, had this last day taken possession of her soul. The moment so long thought of, so earnestly desired, now stood with a kind of terror before her eyes.

"This is our last meeting as — as we now are, Isabel," Herbert began at last, gravely but calmly. "When next I see you, it must be almost as strangers that we shall meet." She looked up in his face, surprised and doubting. "You could not think, dear Isabel," he said, answering her look, "that I should let you go bound to your father's house?"

"Bound?" she repeated. "I don't understand you."

“ You are going into a new world, Isabel ; I well know how new, how exciting to you. You are going to begin a new life ; you must not go bound by a tie which you have contracted in comparative solitude.”

“ Still I don't understand,” said Isabel, simply. “ Are we not bound in word as well as in affection ?”

“ We can release ourselves,” he said, smiling sadly, that rare and peculiar smile which, when it passed over his face, had so deep a meaning. “ I have suffered”— he paused, and closed his eyes as if over the anguish within ; “ but no matter — I saw at once how it must be. It is a duty, and, if a hard one, still not the less a duty.”

“ You are deceiving yourself, Herbert. How can it ever be a duty to break the vows that have been exchanged ? I see how it is,” she continued, after a moment's pause ; and a flush of wounded feeling passed over her face ; “ you doubt me ?”

“ No, Isabel, I trust you as I trust myself ; but will you listen to me for a moment ?

You are going into a life so new that you cannot even conceive what it will be. You are no longer at the disposal of your aunt. Of me your father might not approve, as the husband of his child—at any rate, not as the choice of her youth and inexperience; and rightly, Isabel, for circumstances change us more than you, in your quiet life, can tell. Could I then let you begin your new life with anything that might give your father pain? Does not this seem right in your eyes? I have thought much about it, and it appears so to me. And besides this, dear Isabel, I must think of you. It is with no doubt of your truth or your love that I speak, but you cannot yourself have an idea of what may be the temptations of your future life. I must think of this for you. You shall go into that new world free — free to choose again, if you should meet with one more worthy of your love—I cannot say who would love you more—that could not be.” He paused, but Isabel still waited. “If at the end of a year you feel as you do now; if, in all the bright world

in which you will move, you find none to love more than I feel you now love me; then, Isabel, dearest Isabel, with what joy would I come to you, and we would together ask your father's blessing on our love!"

A momentary smile of gladness passed over his face, but it faded again.

"Perhaps you are right, Herbert," after a long pause Isabel replied; "I am scarcely myself to-day, scarcely understand your words, but I think that perhaps you are right; I will go free to my father; but oh, Herbert!" and she looked up in his face with an expression that sunk into the depths of his soul — "do you suppose it possible that I can forget you?"

"No, Isabel," he said, in a low voice; and they walked on again in silence.

The short day began to close. Charles Denison was to arrive at the inn late in the evening, and very early the next morning Isabel was to go with him to London. Herbert had determined to part from her now; the evening, he felt, was Miss Shepherd's right; and to sit and gaze upon her, and not

have her all to himself, would be but increase of agony. He stopped her as they drew near the house.

“I will not come in, Isabel; it is better so, indeed,” he said, as he saw she would have remonstrated. “Your aunt has a first right to you to-night, and I—” he paused; then, with his sad smile, added, “I must go and accustom myself to Ellerton without you.”

She stood still, without speaking. Large tears had gathered in her eyes, but they did not fall. Herbert drew a deep breath, to command himself to the last.

“I will go now,” he said, and took her hand. “I thank you, Isabel, for your love, even if....Whatever comes, you know not what it has been to me. And now, Isabel, dearest Isabel, God bless you, and keep you pure and bright, as you are, amid the temptations of the world to which you are going!” He wrung the hand he held, waited not for the words which he saw she tried, but tried in vain, to speak—and they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child?
Ada, sole daughter of my house and heart.

BYRON.

The last evening is always too sad for words. The change, whatever the change may be, is too near to be spoken of. It cannot be talked over lightly, sadly it must not be, for the inward grief is too near the surface to be restrained if once the fountain is unsealed; and so, almost in silence, Isabel passed her last evening at Ellerton.

The morning came. She had kissed her aunt and Mrs. Shepherd; to please the latter she had attempted to swallow some breakfast. She had looked her farewell to the house, the garden, and all the familiar scenes of her childhood and her youth, and stood ready,

waiting for Mr. Charles Denison, when he arrived in the carriage her father had sent for her. It was a pretty travelling chariot, with four horses, a sight which had gladdened the heart of the landlord of the Swan Inn, who, with his wife and the waiter, gloried over their own discernment, in having recognised a real gentleman in the solitary traveller who came to them.

“Are you ready, Miss Denison?” he said, as he jumped out, with much tact avoiding any allusion to her peculiar situation on this their first meeting. “There is no hurry; pray don’t let me hurry you.”

“I’m quite ready, thank you,” she said, calmly. Without turning her head again, she once more held out her hand to her aunt, who stood, calm as herself, to see her off, and hastily stepped into the carriage.

It was a long and a dreary journey, and Isabel’s courage almost failed when she found herself alone with a stranger, and on her way to none but strangers. How differently had she a thousand times pictured to herself the

meeting with her father ! There seemed something chilling, chilling as the wintry weather, in this way of claiming his long-neglected child. Charles Denison seemed to understand what her feelings must be, for he turned from her, and amused himself by watching a few flakes of snow which were falling. He had expected a burst of grief, always painful to a man to witness ; and he looked, therefore, with admiration on the self-command which enabled her, with that pale sad countenance, to sit so calmly by his side.

They arrived, at last, in Grosvenor Square. The carriage stopped. Charles Denison handed out the pale, trembling, dreaming daughter, and, shaking hands with her kindly and affectionately, left her to the servant. He knew his brother too well to venture in.

The servant led her into a large, well-lighted, richly-furnished drawing-room, but she saw nothing ; and her heart beat so wildly, that she felt as if she could hear nothing but its pulses. She was still standing where she had been left, when the servant returned. She

started as the door opened, but it was only to beg her to follow again, and she was led to Mr. Denison's dressing-room. It was empty, and still she stood with her beating heart, and felt as if life could not bear it much longer. Her eye was on the door by which she had entered; but, after a suspense of about five minutes, another door on the opposite side of the room slowly opened, and a tall, grave figure stood in the entrance. For a moment the father and daughter gazed on each other without speaking, without moving;—then Isabel rushed towards the door where Mr. Denison stood, and fell almost lifeless in his arms.

He tore off her bonnet, he placed her on a sofa, he put back her long dark hair from her face,—again and again he kissed her cold forehead — and slowly she opened her large eyes, and smiled.

“What is your name?” he murmured. It had passed from his memory,—another name only was before him and trembled upon his lips.

“Isabel.”

He rose, paced up and down the room, pressed his hand on his throbbing brow, and then returned to gaze upon her.

“You are beautiful, my child,” he said, “but you are not like your mother. Oh, Isabel! have you forgiven me, for her and for yourself?” From his stern proud eyes the tears fell fast upon her hand.

“I have nothing to forgive,” she said, looking up at him with the unutterable love that was springing towards him in her heart.

“Does not this repay for all?”

There was a low knock at the door. It was Mrs. Denison, who feared this first meeting for her husband.

“May I come in, George?” she asked, gently.

Mr. Denison led her up to Isabel, who rose to receive her young stepmother. She was a pale, fair woman, at six-and-twenty, as young-looking as Isabel. Mrs. Denison kissed her affectionately, and said a few kind words, gently, but timidly. She then looked anxiously at her husband, whose pale cheek and

compressed lips bespoke deep inward suffering.

“ Isabel looks tired,” she said, turning towards him. “ You must let me take her up to rest before dinner. Will you come ?” she continued, smiling kindly as Mr. Denison nodded his acquiescence, and they left the room together. She took her up to a pretty room on the second floor, and there left her, saying she would come back again.

Happy to be alone, Isabel sunk into a reverie in her chair. It was over then—this longed-for, this of late dreaded meeting was over. She had seen her father—and what a father!—with her own eyes; and, strange as all seemed, she was in her own home. Before long, her reflections were interrupted by the entrance of her maid, a little country girl, in whose simple mind Ellerton was the world, and the beginning of Paradise the day on which she became Isabel’s maid. She came in loaded with parcels, and stood breathless before her mistress.

“ Oh, dear miss ! how happy we shall be !”

Happiness was not the feeling at that moment uppermost in Isabel's agitated mind, and, with some surprise, she asked why.

"Why, miss, it's a palace! Such lamps, such stairs, such carpets, I was almost afraid to tread on them. What would Miss Shepherd say? Oh! Miss Isabel, how happy we shall be!"

"Grandeur does not make happiness, Annie," said Isabel, with a sigh. "We were very happy at Ellerton."

"Yes, miss, because we knew no better there. Now...." and she looked round with an air of importance which bespoke the sudden acquisition of a whole world of knowledge. "There's the dressing-bell, miss; a very civil person told me as how it would soon ring. Pray, miss, begin at once; we must not fluster to-night."

Isabel rose, as she desired; it was not vanity which made her anxious on this night to look her best.

The dressing was over. With a scream of delight Annie saw a long looking-glass, and rather

rudely pushed her young mistress towards it. Isabel had never had so good a view of herself before, and she contemplated her appearance with some anxiety. She might have been satisfied. Her dark, shining hair contrasted with her fair skin and snow-white dress, while the agitation of her mind gave a brilliancy that was almost dazzling to her eyes and complexion; but she shook her head.

“ I wonder if I am like other people,” she said, musingly.

“ No, miss, not the least like any one I ever saw before,” said Annie, promptly. As she had never seen any one but Miss Bridges and the Miss Chapmans, her assurance carried neither comfort nor the contrary; and, with a smile at her own anxiety, Isabel turned away.

Mrs. Denison came at last. “ Are you ready, Isabel?” she said; and, laying her hand kindly on her arm, she led her along the passage. “ Will you come in here for a minute? I wish to speak to you;” and she opened and closed again the door of her own

dressing-room. “ I should have come to you before, dear Isabel, but your father has been so much agitated I could not leave him. I wished to tell you that I loved you for his sake. There was a time, a few months back, when I first heard of your existence, that I thought of your appearance only with pain, as perhaps you may have thought of me; but all such feeling is over now with both of us—is it not? And you will love me, not perhaps as a mother,” and she glanced, with a smile, at her own youthful face reflected in the glass, near which they stood, “ but as your elder sister, Isabel, and we will be very happy.”

Isabel felt her stepmother’s kindness. Doubtless, there might be much to pain—much to annoy—in this sudden coming of a daughter to her home; and with tearful eyes, she gratefully and affectionately kissed her. But her mind reverted to the one subject of anxiety that filled all her thoughts, and which the agitated meeting with her father had not entirely satisfied. “ And my father—will he love me?”

“ Yes, Isabel—he loves you already ; and he loved your mother,” she continued, with some emotion ; “ he has always worn her hair next to his heart. I knew not till now whose memory it was he prized so fondly. But he is cold sometimes, and grave, and reserved. It may give you pain, but it is only his manner, dear Isabel ; and you must not allow it to trouble you, or, at any rate, not to make you doubt his love. But, now, come, or we shall be late ; you must be punctual on your first night.”

They went down together to the drawing-room. Charles Denison came forward, with a smile of welcome. He was like an old acquaintance, and Isabel felt a moment’s pleasure in seeing him ; but her father did not come, and her heart began to beat, and in vain she tried to talk and to laugh. A terror, greater even than on their first meeting, was stealing over her.

Mrs. Denison, too, after a time, began to look uneasy. She looked at her watch, walked to the door, then sate down again. Almost

half an hour had passed, and still he did not appear. At last, as with a sudden thought, she turned to Isabel, and, in a quiet tone, which was meant to convey that it was the most natural thing in the world, she said, "I wish you would call your father, Isabel; tell him that dinner is waiting, and that Charles is come. You can't miss the door of his room; it is straight along the passage, exactly opposite the door of this one."

Isabel raised her wondering eyes, but obeyed.

"What do you think of her?" asked Charles Denison, as she closed the door. "She is beautiful, is she not?"

"Beautiful indeed!" and Emmeline sighed as she said it. "You don't know what an effect her appearance has had on George. I have been quite frightened about him. He must have loved very deeply, Charles—more than he does now," and the tears started into her eyes.

Isabel reached her father's door. She knocked once and twice, but so faintly and

timidly that it was no wonder she was unheard. She knocked a third time; it was still faint and low, but there came a harsh "Come in." She opened the door, almost breathless with agitation, but with a boldness that afterwards astonished herself, and stood for a moment in the entrance. There he was, seated on a sofa, the proud, resolute Mr. Denison, with his face buried in his hands, unable to face again his child, the mere sight of whom had awakened in his heart a remorse from which he shrunk in terror. He scarcely raised his head as the door opened—he fancied it was Emmeline. Isabel stood for a moment in the doorway, then closed it, and glided to his side.

"I came....I was sent to fetch you," she murmured.

He started—looked up, then hid his face again.

She knelt beside him. "You are not angry with me, papa?" she said, in that low, sweet voice, which had something of the calming power of music; and, gently withdrawing his hands, she looked up in his face with unutter-

able tenderness. He gazed upon her for an instant, sighed, stooped and kissed her brow, and the dark fit passed away.

“The fears of fancy are most terrible.” He almost smiled to think how his beautiful child had been standing before him since their first meeting—not as she was—not as he now felt she was, but in stern reproof—an inexorable judge.

“Not angry with you, dearest,” he said, tenderly; “only angry with myself; but it is past now—let us go.” He walked hurriedly to the door; then, as hurriedly, turned back, and touched his daughter’s arm. “Stay, Isabel,” he said: “after this night, let the past be forgotten; we speak on this subject no more; but, while I can speak, I tell you, my child, I loved your mother, even when I forsook her. See,” he said, rapidly drawing a locket from his bosom, and as rapidly concealing it again. “And now, my child, give me one of your shining curls; you shall be joined together in my heart, at least. And you must learn to love me, Isabel, as *she* loved me.”

CHAPTER X.

..... The sentinel
 (That should ring 'larum to the heart) doth sleep.
 BEN JONSON.

It is not but the tempest that doth show
 The seaman's cunning, but the field that tries
 The captain's courage.
 DANIEL.

Grosvenor Square, May 6, —.

My dearest Aunt Rachel,

You ask me if I am happy. I am, I am indeed, very happy;—but when I tell you that I am happy, you must never for a moment suppose that I forget you or *anybody* at Ellerton. I liked being at Torquay, for it was very beautiful, and now I like being in London, for it is all very new and exciting; but it is none of these things that makes me happy. It is papa. Oh, Aunt Rachel! you

cannot conceive what an interest it is to me to try and please him ! I must be happy when he looks kindly at me, as he often does, and life can never be tedious while I try to avoid his grave looks, which I dread more than anything in the world. This was what interested me at Torquay, and this is what interests me more than all besides in London.

I have been going out a good deal, and I like it, but I don't think I like it very much indeed. I know some agreeable people, but there are none that I particularly care about. At first, I thought almost everybody clever and amusing ; people have a light, merry way of speaking, which makes me laugh and pleases me at the time, but it does not make me care about seeing them again ; I begin to wish for something else. Will you tell Herbert what I say, that is, if you think it right. The only person in London that he need be jealous of is papa ; I think he may be a little jealous of him.

I think, even you, Aunt Rachel. would not call my present life very dissipated. We often

go out, but we never stay late, and we seldom breakfast later than ten o'clock; and after breakfast I read with Mrs. Denison, and I have masters, and I really don't waste a very great deal of time. In short, I begin to think that I am a very steady, sedate person, and that you and Herbert were quite wrong in your fears about me. I often think of Ellerton, and I have wild visions of driving down for one night (a good long drive), and once I said something about it to papa, but he looked grave, and so I must give it up for the present. And now, I must end my long, and, I am afraid, selfish letter; but you ask me so many questions that I am obliged to write about myself.

Mr. Charles Denison is just come in, and begs me to give his best love to you; and also begs that if you see Mr. Grey, you will tell him that he is only just beginning to forget his sermon. I dare say he only meant these messages for impertinence, but I told him I should give them to you.

God bless you, dear Aunt Rachel! I am

sure, judging by myself, that I need not say do not forget me.

Your most affectionate,

ISABEL DENISON.

Miss Shepherd read this letter and smiled. She watched for the days on which Isabel usually wrote to her, with an anxiety which she had never felt on any subject before, and if by chance the expected letter did not come, it was a disappointment which even her well-regulated mind could not prevent from throwing a shade over the day. They came like gleams of sunshine over her heart. She had read this letter and smiled. Thinking it would please Herbert Grey, she gave it to him on their next meeting: he read it, laid it down, and sighed.

“Now, Herbert, why do you sigh?” said Miss Shepherd, with some dissatisfaction. “Surely there is nothing in that letter but what should give us pleasure?”

“I hardly know why I sighed,” said Herbert, and yet he sighed again. “So bright,

so confident, it makes me tremble—tremble lest I should lose her,” he added, in a low, tremulous voice. “But you are right; there is nothing to sigh about. How happy she seems, and how unspoilt!” and he took up the letter again.

That Herbert should sigh was not unnatural. Her mention of him was not, *perhaps*, quite such as would please or satisfy a lover’s anxious heart. Perhaps he felt this, although Miss Shepherd could not.

Isabel spoke the truth as to her own feelings. When Mr. and Mrs. Denison arrived in London after Easter, having spent the winter at Torquay for the benefit of Mrs. Denison’s health, she was presented, and, as the phrase is, “came out.” So graceful, so beautiful, and an heiress, it was impossible that she should not make a sensation, and the admiration and flattery lavished upon her were sufficient to satisfy even Mr. Denison’s exacting pride and affection. And Isabel was excited: there were moments when her heart beat at the looks and words of admiration which

seldom failed to greet her, but it was only for the moment—their memory faded from her mind as quickly as the voices from her ear,—and in a position calculated to dazzle the strongest, she was not satisfied. The seclusion of her life, a friend to deeper thought than is common with young girls, her short but interesting acquaintance with Herbert, and the vein of romance which, uneventful as her life had been, had tinged its early history, made the frivolous gossip and often unmeaning conversation of her London acquaintance insipid, if not tiresome; and though she liked the excitement of her present life, she was not carried away by it. She was dissatisfied. It requires some object more than commonly interesting, to make a London ball-room agreeable night after night, except to the very young, or the very heartless. The time was approaching, however, which was to try her more severely.

A few mornings after the date of her letter to Miss Shepherd, Isabel ran hastily down to breakfast, having been delayed to a later hour

than usual. When she opened the door, she saw a young man sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Denison. He got up as she entered.

“Why on earth are you so late, my dear Isabel?” said her father. “Clarence has been waiting this half hour to see you. Lord Clarence Broke, Isabel.”

As she bowed, a thought just flashed through her mind. “I must have seen that face before;” but after an instant’s surprise, Lord Clarence came towards her.

“We are old acquaintance, surely, Miss Denison?” and he held out his hand to her with a smile that had once haunted her memory.

“Old acquaintance!” said Mrs. Denison; “Why, where can you and Clarence have met, Isabel?”

She looked at him with a puzzled look; then there came a blush and a smile; and—“Ah! I remember;” but she did not explain. Lord Clarence, in a few words, related their meeting near Ellerton.

“I little knew who you were, Miss Deni-

son," he said, turning again towards her; "and though I have often and often thought of your kindness, I little thought we ever should meet again." He had sate down for a moment, but soon rose to go.

"Have you taken your seat, Clarence?" asked Mr. Denison.

"No; I go down to the House to-day, and I have to ride into the country first, to look at a horse, which makes me rather in a hurry this morning. Is there anything going on? I have been talking and speechifying so much lately myself, that I have not had time to read or to hear anything."

"Yes, I believe there will be rather an important division to-night."

"Ah! well, I shall be down there. I heard that I *must* take my seat to-day. Do you go out to-night, Emmeline?"

"Yes, we are going to a ball at Lady Louisa King's. Shall we see you there?"

"If you had asked me that question ten minutes ago, I should have said Certainly not; but now, I think, I shall avail myself of a

polite invitation which I saw on my table ;” and he smiled at Isabel as he spoke,—that haunting smile.

Lord Clarence Broke was a first cousin of Emmeline’s, a year or two older than herself. They had been much together in their childhood, and now, after many years, their early friendship caused them to meet again almost as brother and sister. Mr. Denison had been returned for a northern borough in the winter, and, having been assisted by Clarence in canvassing at the time of his election, the former had taken a great fancy to him, and Isabel had heard much of him, both from her father and Emmeline.

He was the second son of the Duke of ———, and a soldier ; but, having a tolerably good fortune of his own, he followed his profession for occupation and amusement, rather than from necessity. He was at this time very happy in having been returned for his native county ; for his active, restless mind was always in search of employment, no uncommon want among the noble, and rich, and prosperous.

He was what officers call a fine young man, and politicians a promising one; what young men call a good fellow, and young ladies a very nice person: all this he was, and a good deal more; but descriptions are tedious things.

“Do you look forward to your ball to-night?” asked Mrs. Denison, as Isabel came down, beautifully dressed, and looking surpassingly lovely. She remarked a peculiar brilliancy in her eyes and complexion, which had struck her before now, whenever Isabel was pleased or excited.

“Yes, I think I do, though I hardly know why;” and Isabel blushed as she spoke, for she had not been conscious of the fact till that moment.

She had danced several times, and was wondering why she had thought so much of a ball, which now struck her as particularly dull, before Lord Clarence appeared. She had just gone back to Mrs. Denison when he entered the room, and immediately came towards them.

“ I had given you up,” said Mrs. Denison ; “ it is one o’clock, and we never stay beyond two.”

“ There was a division, and, of course, I was obliged to stay for it. However, I must not complain, for at one time I did not think it would have been over till two or three o’clock.”

A young man approached, and asked Isabel to dance. Not very well pleased, she was forced to say yes.

“ Now, Emmeline,” said Lord Clarence, “ is not this hard? I did not like to treat Miss Denison in the usual style, beginning at once with, ‘ Are you engaged for the next quadrille?’ and see how I am rewarded! Now it must be done. ‘ Are you engaged for the next quadrille but one, Miss Denison?’”

At last they went to dance. As they stood together before the music began, he turned to her suddenly—

“ I have been very much put out all to-day. Do you know why, Miss Denison? No, I dare say you would not guess! It was at seeing,

when I remembered you so well, how little you remembered me. Not that I could have expected you to remember me, but sometimes one is disappointed even when one does not expect a thing."

"I remembered that I had seen you before, only I could not recollect where."

"Ah! but if I had met you in any part of the world—in India—I should have remembered you. I have so often caught myself thinking of you and your pretty little companion. It was strange, our meeting, was it not?" She slightly blushed—she could not have told why. "How changed your life must be!" he said, looking at her, after a pause. "I only passed through Ellerton once, but it seemed a dull place."

"Quiet, perhaps, but not dull. I was very sorry to leave it."

"I suppose, because you were fond of the place. We all like our 'Childhood's Home,' don't we? But you could not have had many amusements there."

"Not amusements exactly, but interests."

“What kind of interests?”

“Duties, and”.... Isabel hesitated, “other things.”

“I must not ask what other things,” said Lord Clarence, smiling; “for I ought to be ashamed of my impertinence. But will you forgive me, if I ask you about your duties?” He saw that she blushed and hesitated. “Don’t answer me now,” he said: “I will ask you again another day, when you know me better. I am almost afraid that you think I should laugh at duties; but you are very much mistaken.”

“Will you talk to me about your present life?” he continued, after a moment. “I am afraid it will be a question again. Do you like going out very much?”

“Yes, I like it,” she said, slowly, “very much, but not madly. I mean, that I expected to like it much better than I really do. Are you fond of this kind of society?”

“I once liked it not very much, but madly,” he said, smiling; “now, I am eight and twenty, Miss Denison, and though I sometimes go out

from habit, I don't like it; it bores me. And yet," after a pause, he added, "I feel to-night as if I were going to have an attack of it again."

"You speak as if it was an illness," said Isabel, laughing.

"It *is* an illness—a downright fever, when the fit is on. I will show you all the symptoms of the disease some day, when I know you better."

"Do you see any bad symptoms in my case?" said Isabel, trying to make herself feel at ease with him, in which she could not quite succeed.

He looked at her with a look of grave scrutiny, then shook his head. "No, strange to say, I think you have entirely escaped! *There* is a very bad case, I'm sure, though I don't know her;" and he pointed to a pretty young girl, who stood at some distance, eagerly talking to three or four people at once. "I laugh now, and moralize a great deal about it," he continued, after a moment, "and am very apt to forget that I once had

the disease as badly as, if not worse than, my neighbours.”

The music stopped, and they returned to Mrs. Denison.

CHAPTER XI.

How happily the days of Thalaba went by!

SOUTHEY.

On the evening of that first day's acquaintance with Clarence, when Isabel sate alone in her room, there was a weight upon her conscience—an undefined fear—that she had enjoyed herself too much, and Herbert's eyes seemed to rest reproachfully upon her. But this was the first, and last, and only time that she was visited by such a reproof; the intimate and familiar terms on which, after this day, she lived with Lord Clarence, while, in fact, increasing tenfold her danger, destroyed all fear of it in her mind.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Denison liked Lord Clarence; and being such near relations, and his own family coming rarely to London, Mr.

Denison gave him a general invitation to his house, and the young man, though he did not presume upon this kindness, yet was not slow to avail himself of it when it was offered. At dinner, especially, they often met. Sometimes Mr. Denison brought him home with him from the House of Commons; sometimes he dined with them before a crowded ball, that he might be of use to Emmeline; in short, a day seldom passed that they did not somewhere meet, and the very excess of her danger utterly blinded Isabel's eyes. Many things aided her delusion; Clarence's manners were frank and open, sometimes affectionate, but rarely *empressé*. He never complimented; and, after their first meeting, never said anything which gave the idea that he thought of her, or marked her out with any particular preference. They were very great friends; Isabel liked to think that he was what a brother would have been to her.

The fact was that, although, from the very first day, Clarence was conscious of a new feeling in his own mind, he kept a strict watch

upon himself. There was no hurry. He would not lightly try to gain her affections; he would not lightly yield his own; he would read the very depths of her heart before he spoke. And she, if he could be so happy as to gain her love, she should not choose him in darkness and in ignorance; but her choice should be made from the world and before the world.

This reasonable determination it was not difficult to follow, as no rival appeared; that is to say, no favoured rival. Many there were who hovered about the beautiful heiress day after day, who would have given the world for a sign of encouragement from her; but, while her beauty attracted them, there was a *retenu* and a dignity in her manners which prevented the slightest approach to a flirtation, and even a lover's wayward heart could not have doubted that to Clarence, however slight that preference might be, the preference was given.

Everything conspired against poor Isabel's heart. If Mr. and Mrs. Denison saw the danger, they approved it. It might be in

their hearts a bright day-dream that Isabel should be Clarence's wife; but neither by word nor look did it ever appear that such a thought had entered their imaginations. Isabel's only safeguard was in their very rare opportunities of private conversation; they were usually a "*partie quarrée*;" and yet, perhaps, after all, this was not a safeguard, but a danger, from the additional interest it gave to their meetings.

About a fortnight after their first acquaintance, at a larger dinner than usual in her father's house, she sat next to Clarence. After a good deal of conversation, in which her other neighbour persisted in joining, there came a pause, and Clarence reverted to the subject of their first discussion.

"I have so few opportunities of really talking to you, that, although I have often thought of it, I have never asked you again about Ellerton. Now that you know me better — shall I say, know me well — will you tell me what duties made you happy there?"

“ Cannot you guess what kind of duties would be required of one in such a place ?”

“ I suppose, you mean visiting the poor—perhaps, reading to them ?”

She smiled.

“ And you say you liked your duties ?”

“ Yes, very, very much. It is a great pleasure to me—I suppose it is to everybody—to feel that I am doing some little good in the world. You cannot think how I miss it in London !”

“ You have duties of another kind here.”

“ Yes, I suppose so,” said Isabel, slowly ; “ but my duties here are so pleasant, and make me so happy, that I sometimes doubt if they can be called duties at all.”

“ I see,—I have remarked before now,” said Lord Clarence, looking at her for a moment, “ that you think very seriously of life. I dare say you are right ; I dare say, if I felt that I was useful to any human creature, I should not have such wearisome, gloomy fits as I often have now.”

“ Gloomy, Lord Clarence ?” and Isabel

raised her eyes to his bright, expressive countenance, with a smile.

“ Yes. Do you doubt what I say? I am pretty well this year, for I have not much time to think about it, but sometimes I am ready to hang myself. My life has no particular object, and, after very young days, a life without an object must be tedious.”

“ Yes; but I suppose that every life *can* have an object?” said Isabel, gently.

“ What is the object of your life?” asked Lord Clarence, looking earnestly at her.

“ Oh, I have plenty to think of! I know that few are so fortunate or can be so happy as I am, but I suppose the most dreary, desolate life that one can conceive ought to have an object?”

“ You mean, I think, in a religious point of view; that to do our duty to God and to man ought to be the object of every one's life. Yes, that may be true, but what is one's duty? Do not think,” he continued, anxiously, “ that I doubt it; but it seems to me an easy thing to say, and a very difficult one

to act upon. I can fancy many kinds of life, very happy life, in which such duty would come naturally; but, in others, in my wandering, desultory life, for instance, what is my duty? I may avoid evil.....perhaps.....but what good can I do?"

"I know so little of life," said Isabel, "that I am not able to answer you, but I am *sure* that you could do some good. If you ever go to Ellerton again, ask my aunt, or Mr. Grey, and they will answer you to your full satisfaction."

"And who is Mr. Grey?"

Here Mrs. Denison carried off the ladies to the drawing-room.

When the gentlemen came up, Charles Denison sate down by Isabel. "What on earth were you talking to Clarence about at dinner? I tried three several times to make you look at Mr. Conway, eating, first, jelly, then cheese, and then ice, with his knife—I believe the very same knife, carefully preserved—but all in vain. If I may be permitted to ask, what was the subject of that interesting discourse?"

“It is no use for me to tell you, Uncle Charles,” said Isabel, smiling, “for you say you never think.”

“Oh! it was moralizing and metaphysics, was it?—I thought as much. Do you like Clarence, Isabel?” he said, after a moment’s pause.

“Yes, very much indeed,” she answered, without a blush and with the most fearless openness.

“Well, he is a very nice fellow, I must say. Some people call him handsome, but I can’t understand that. That young preacher at Ellerton was a handsome man, Isabel — that’s my style. Which do you think the best looking of the two?”

“Oh! Mr. Grey, no doubt. I never saw anybody like him. But I don’t agree with you, Uncle Charles,” she continued, with the same open manner; “I think Lord Clarence very good-looking, too.”

At her uncle’s question, a feeling shot through Isabel’s mind, one of those strange, vague, unpleasant sensations which we have

scarcely time to lay hold of before they pass and are gone. If, however, it was a momentary effort of conscience to awake her from her blindness, it was, as is too often the case, fruitless, for her answer not only allayed any suspicion which might have arisen, but excited a feeling of complacency and self-approbation, which of all things is the most effectual bar to the oppositions of conscience.

It must not be supposed that any of these thoughts or feelings passed consciously through Isabel's mind; it was one of those strange internal processes which occupy but an instant, and which pass unnoticed at the time, but which are often remembered afterwards, and, if remembered, serve to remind us that we did not fall into temptation without some warning, however little heeded by ourselves.

Her open manner saved her from another warning, which would probably have been more effectual. Charles Denison had intended to teaze his niece about Clarence, as a young uncle might think himself privileged to do, but the result of his short conversation made

him think it unnecessary. He was wrong, however, in the inference he drew from her ready confession of liking Clarence. He did not consider that it must be conscious love which would make a shiness about it. When love comes in a more subtle form, the fearless confidence, the undisguised preference, becomes at once the danger and the symptom of the danger.

CHAPTER XII.

True, gentle love is like the summer dew,
Which falls around when all is still and hush,
And falls unseen, until its bright drops strew
With odours, herb and flower, and bank and bush.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

But what can love, even the highest love, say more?
What it would say I know not, but I can guess what it
would feel. It is a quicker pulsation in the veins of friend-
ship; it is the higher life....."

The Neighbours.

The London season was drawing to a close; Isabel's intimacy with Lord Clarence had increased every day; and with that intimacy the blindness and delusion with respect to her own feelings increased also. She still wrote in unconscious innocence to Miss Shepherd. She still thought of Herbert. He remained shrined in her secret heart as a thing apart,

and she did not remark how seldom that shrine was visited where once all her thoughts had delighted to dwell. She had little time to remark it, little time to think; it was not that outwardly her dissipation had much increased, but inwardly it had,—the excitement of her mind never died away. And still Clarence aided the delusion: through the whole season, no lightest word of love had ever crossed his lips.

One night he had dined with them, before a ball. Isabel went up to dress immediately after dinner, and came down, as she usually did, to be ready to make her father's tea. She found Clarence alone.

“Mr. Denison has just been called to speak to somebody; railway business, I think. He begged you would make tea, and said he should soon be back.”

She made the tea, and then sate down at the table where Clarence had been seated.

“Why did you look so surprised at dinner to-day, when I said that Miss Forester was going to be married?” asked Lord Clarence.

“ I wished so much to ask you the reason why, but I waited.”

“ I was not surprised at her marrying— only at her marrying Mr. Graves.”

“ But why? Mr. Graves is a very good sort of man, above the average, I should say, a good deal.”

“ Oh, yes, it was not that, but it was only about three weeks ago that she was quite laughing at the idea! She said there were particular reasons why she and Mr. Graves should be great friends, but that they were nothing more.”

“ I believe she spoke truly,” said Clarence. “ He was a friend of her brother’s, and was with him when he died abroad. They have only just thought of marriage. But that is the commonest of all delusions,” he said, smiling, “ that of being only great friends.”

“ You don’t mean to say that men and women can’t be friends?” said Isabel, with a look of surprise.

“ No, I don’t mean to say that; but I know that I have sometimes remarked myself, and I

have very often heard the remark made, that great friendships usually end in love, on one side, or on both. I can understand it," he continued; "such persons begin only with friendship, but every day they grow to know more and more of each other, probably to know each other thoroughly; their tastes and pursuits, too, generally are the same; for it is necessary in friendship, though not in love: and suddenly, some day, friendship ends and love begins."

"But not the highest kind of love," said Isabel.

"No, not the highest, but, I believe, the happiest; the course of such true love more often runs smooth; and then the chances of happiness in married life are greater; for there must be such a thorough knowledge, and dependence, and confidence, in each other."

Isabel sate thoughtfully. Her fingers were playing with some ornaments on the table, and her eyes were fixed earnestly, and yet vacantly, on the shapes and figures in which

she placed them. She was thinking, not of Clarence, but of Herbert. She was asking herself, was not that the kind of love she felt for him. "You seem to admire that kind of love," she said, at last, without raising her eyes.

For the first time it struck him that she might be thinking of herself and of him. "No, I don't," he said; "I only say it is happy. I *like* a higher kind of love than that; but then, the higher kind of love I can't but own to be more dangerous also."

"Dangerous!" and Isabel lifted her eyes to his face.

"Yes, dangerous. Is it not dangerous to feel love growing to worship—to idolatry? Is there not a danger," he said, with a smile, but a grave one, "of forgetting the first great commandment?"

Still Isabel sat thoughtful. How little had it ever crossed her to fear that she loved Herbert too much!

"Here is a description of something very like worship or idolatry," continued Clarence,

taking up a book from the table. "I was reading it when you came into the room. Shall I read it to you?" and, with a low, melodious voice, and expressive manner, he read the following lines:—

Wouldst thou be mine,
 I'd love thee with such love, thou canst not dream
 How wide, how full, how deep—whose gracious beam
 Should on thy pathway ever shine.

Wouldst thou be mine—I'd be
 As father, mother, friend, to thee ;
 Thou never shouldst, in thy new bliss,
 Their old, their dear affection, miss ;
 For I would love thee better still,
 Soothe thee in sorrow, guard from ill,
 Would cherish thee each passing hour,
 As the sun cherishes the flower,
 Whose ceaseless gladdening sunbeams play
 Around it through the livelong day.

 All this should be, wouldst thou
 But be mine own, mine only love,
 And every changing day should prove
 How faithful my first vow.

 Wert thou but mine—Oh! could
 My voice some tone persuasive take,
 And in thy breast some answering passion wake,
 Then it were well—were good—
 All life were light—but now
 My life is dark; and thou, and thou—

Is there no darkness in thy life?
No loneliness, when pain and grief
Oppress thy tender, gentle heart?
Couldst thou be mine, no sorrows' dart
Should deeply wound, for I'd be there,
And love the darkening clouds should clear,
Or make the very darkness shine
By love's dear power—wert thou but mine!

The lines were only just finished when Mr. and Mrs. Denison came into the room. Isabel sat thoughtful still. What new and strange sensations were those which thrilled through her heart as he read? Alas, she knew not!

The cloud upon her brow made Clarence's spirit bound with delight, and he said within himself that the time of his probation should be short.

CHAPTER XIII.

. . . . Thus gaze met gaze,
And heart saw heart translucid through the rays.
The New Timon.

The last ball of the year was over. Isabel stood, with Mrs. Denison, in the cloak-room, while Clarence went for the carriage. A young man approached her.

“ Well, this is a sad night, Miss Denison ; it’s all over now. How sorry you must be ! ”

“ Yes, I am rather sorry ; what I dislike most is to say good-bye to so many people. ”

“ It must be so much worse for women than for men, ” continued the young man, compassionately ; “ we have hunting and shooting to look forward to, at any rate ; you have nothing till next year. ”

“ I am sorry, ” said Isabel, smiling, “ that

you think so poorly of women as to suppose they care for nothing but going out. I assure you, I look forward, without much dread, to the autumn."

"Are you going to visit, then?"

"No, not that I know of; but really, Mr. Erskine, I will not be thought so ill of. You seem to think it is impossible that I can live quietly at home."

"I dare say, then, you read a great deal, or draw....By the bye, did you tell Mrs. Denison about the pictures? My father says they are very well worth seeing. Some pictures for sale in London," he said, turning to Mrs. Denison. "There is one picture so like Miss Denison, you ought to go and see it. Do let us go; at any rate, it will be something to do."

"Yes, do let us go," said Clarence, as he joined them. "Could you drive there at four to-morrow, Emmeline? Very well, I will take you in my cab, if you like, Erskine."

It was a small collection of pictures exhibited for a few days for sale—a good many

of the few remaining people in London were there.

Among other pictures by well-known artists, there was a Spanish Girl, by Murillo, an unfinished sketch, which certainly, in the eyes and smile, strongly resembled Isabel. Several persons observed it, collected round, and commented upon it. To escape from the most unpleasant of all remarks—remarks on one's eyes, and nose, and mouth, which seem to turn every separate feature into a conscious human being—Isabel retreated to a picture at some distance, which had attracted her attention on first going into the room. It was a small head of the Virgin Mary by an unknown, perhaps inferior artist; but one of the most beautiful ideals of perfect purity that the mind could conceive. She stood for some time before it.

“Is it not beautiful?” she said at last, turning to Clarence, who had joined her. “It does one good to look at it!”

She moved away a few steps, then returned again. “I should like to have that always

near me. I think, if I was restless, or excited, or unhappy, it would always have the power to calm and comfort me." She sighed as she spoke.

"Why do you sigh, Miss Denison?" asked Clarence, anxiously. "You are not unhappy, surely?"

"Oh, no! not unhappy; but those eyes made me feel sad. They seem to reprove me for the dissipated life I have been leading of late. Still I like to look at it, and am sorry to leave it. Though it reproves, it is a reproof that pleases me."

That evening, Isabel dined out. When she went up to bed, on her return home, the first thing she saw, hanging in her room, was the picture which had so much attracted her attention. For an instant, an undefined fear shot through her mind, but only for an instant; the next moment she quietly remarked to herself, "I am sure it must be Lord Clarence—how very, very kind of him!"

Again she stood before the picture, and a strange sadness stole over her mind as she

gazed. There was something in the holy look of the eyes and the brow, which reminded her of Herbert, and, calm and pure as they were, they seemed to fall upon her reproachfully. "I cannot think what is the matter with me to-day," she said, at last, turning from it, and trying to rouse herself from her thoughtful mood. "I could almost believe that I felt a presentiment of evil."

The following afternoon Isabel and Mrs. Denison walked, as was often the case, in Kensington Gardens. As they came out, they were joined by Lord Clarence, and another young man, who were riding, and who had dismounted on seeing their carriage, and they walked together to the place where the carriage stood. Clarence placed himself by Isabel. She instantly began to thank him, in the most earnest manner, for his kindness in sending her the picture.

"Pray, don't thank me," he said; "you would not think it necessary, if you knew how selfish a pleasure it had been to me."

Something in his voice and manner startled

her ; what, she could not tell, but her heart beat within her. Her eyes were beginning to open. Strange power of a tone, a mere cadence, to reveal long-hidden, undreamt-of secrets !

“ There was another picture there, which I bought,” he continued, after a moment, as if he was carried on to speak—“ for myself, Miss Denison.”

With a quick, involuntary movement Isabel raised her eyes, and they met those of Lord Clarence fixed upon her with an expression that could not easily be misunderstood. Nor did she fail to read it aright. She turned away her head.

“ Will you not ask me what my choice could be, or do you know it too well ?” — he bent forward as he spoke.

She was silent : her heart beat violently, and a deep blush rose to her cheek, but a smile played round her lips, and Clarence saw it. He loved her ; this was the only thought that thrilled through her mind, and it was a thrill of rapture. Clarence loved her—Herbert was forgotten. They reached the carriage, and,

without a word, she jumped in, and hastily pulled down her veil.

“ My dear Isabel, Lord Vernon has spoken to you twice,” said Mrs. Denison.

She leaned forward, with a murmured apology.

“ I only said I was afraid you were very hot,” said the unfortunate youth, thus compelled to repeat his civility a third time. He might well say so, her very brow was flushed with emotion.

They drove home in silence. Mrs. Denison was the kindest of women, the kindest of *chaperons*. She never intruded her advice, never sought a confidence that was not willingly given ; never spoke if silence was preferred, but was always willing either to speak, or to listen, or to advise. She did not, perhaps, thoroughly understand Isabel’s character, but they had never had a moment’s discomfort, and this was no light praise, for there were times when Mr. Denison’s admiration for his daughter, and apparent preference for her society, gave her many a secret pang.

They drove along in silence. Isabel was in a trance. Not one thought, yet, of Herbert. But when they reached the house, and she had flown up to her room, the holy eyes of Clarence's picture fell upon her, and at once Herbert stood before her, with his sad, reproachful gaze.

Joy was passed — sorrow and remorse had begun.

Oh! how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!

CHAPTER XIV.

The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And stern, and self-possessed.

LONGFELLOW.

To describe the feelings of that hour were impossible. From the revelation of her own heart in sickening anguish Isabel turned away. She, who had so admired all that was great and noble; she, who had so often and so loudly condemned falsehood and inconstancy, who had so remembered, so mourned over her father's sin; she it was who had prepared this bitter cup for him who loved her so devotedly! There was no mistake—all now was as clear as day—she loved Clarence, and Clarence only.

Every thought that could aggravate her

guilt now presented itself to her awakened conscience. She thought how it was in absence, when none was there to plead for him, that her faithless memory had forgotten Herbert. She remembered how she had chosen one bright, and rich, and gay, and noble, while he was far away in his humble, but most holy duties. She remembered how she was poisoning anew the life which before now a woman's falsehood had embittered—and then she thought of his care for her, of his providing for her against this very temptation! Thought upon thought arose, till she seemed to herself a creature dyed with the blackest guilt, and in cold and silent despair she laid her aching head upon the table.

In vain Annie endeavoured to arouse her young mistress, when the dressing-hour came. She merely shook her head, and remained immoveable. At last, the appearance of Mrs. Denison, whom Annie, alarmed at Isabel's pale cheek, had summoned, recalled her to the necessity of self-command; and, pleading a violent headache—and her temples throbbed

indeed almost to bursting—she begged to be allowed to go to bed, instead of dining out.

In the quietness of the hours thus gained, she revolved the whole of the last year of her excited life. Every scene lived again; almost every word spoken by Herbert or Clarence came again to her memory, and in shame and anguish she found, that for many, many weeks, Clarence had filled every thought and feeling of her heart.

The hours of that long night passed at length; the stern self-examination was concluded; and the morning found her pale, calm, sad, and resolved.

She went down to breakfast, as usual. If Mr. and Mrs. Denison suspected anything from the agitation of the previous day, they left it to its own course. They were too anxious for an event which they thought must ensure Isabel's perfect happiness, to disturb, or, as is perhaps often the case, destroy it, by any premature remark or inquiry. To her answer of "Much better—almost quite well," Mrs. Denison replied by shaking her head.

“ I hope you are *better*, dear Isabel, for you seemed to be in great pain last night, but those pale cheeks don't look like quite well. You must consent to stay at home to-day. I am obliged to go to the Horticultural Gardens about those plants for the Grove, but I will get my cousin to go with me.”

Isabel was too happy to acquiesce.

Mrs. Denison went out immediately after luncheon. “ I shall leave word that Clarence may come up, if he calls,” she said, as she left the room, bending over some china as she spoke. “ He dined at Colonel Wood's last night, and said he should call early this afternoon, and at the moment I forgot all about the Gardens. Your father said he might dine here, if he was disengaged ; will you ask him ? I think he is sure to come.”

To make quite sure, Isabel repeated the order to the servant. She now only longed to have their meeting over. Her sense of wretchedness, however, prevented the *waiting* from being insupportable. She was cold and calm in her despair ; and, having given the

order, she took some flowers into the inner drawing-room, and proceeded to pass the time, by arranging them in fanciful patterns in a large flower-basket.

She was so occupied, when there came the quick knock at the door, and the light rapid step on the stairs, which she knew so well, and Clarence was in the room.

He came hastily forward, and took her hand. The blood mounted for an instant to her temples, then died away again, and she resumed her occupation. He came towards the table where she stood, and placed himself at her side.

“ Isabel,” he said at last.

Again her colour rose and died away, and her fingers moved nervously among the flowers, but she was silent.

“ Isabel,” he said again, in an earnest, imploring tone, and attempted, but very gently, to take her hand. It was hastily withdrawn.

“ Are you offended with me?” he said, “ or do you refuse to understand me, and must I in plain terms say, ‘ I love you, Isabel?’ ”

Her fingers ceased from their employment ; she leant her two hands on the table ; but still she was silent.

“ Why so silent, dearest Isabel ?” he said, gently, for he thought it was agitation that overpowered her ; “ one word, one look even, is enough. Only tell me that I—that you will be mine, if indeed I can be so blest.”

Her utterance came at last. “ No, Lord Clarence—no, that cannot be !” She paused, then went hurriedly on. “ I loved another, I was engaged to another, long before I knew you. Forgive me, for I am very miserable !” and she clasped her hands together with a look of despair.

There was a dead silence. Clarence moved from her side ; and, with his arms folded, and his brows knit, leant against the wall. He had been so secure, even the doubts and fears common to almost every lover’s mind had scarcely been his ; for he had read her love again and again in her speaking eyes ; and the prosperous course of his attachment had prevented his feeling, in its fulness, until this

moment, how every fibre of his heart was entwined round this idol of his affections. The hours of anxiety and sorrow reveal what joy could never tell.

There was a long silence. Clarence did not speak—did not even look at her. With her clasped, imploring hands, the agitated girl approached him, stood before him; and, in a hurried, excited manner, told him of her engagement—of her freedom.

“Indeed, indeed,” she concluded, “I never thought you loved me—never, never, till yesterday. We were such friends, I never thought of more till then. Then I saw—then I was guilty—then it was such joy, that I forgot all but that you loved me, and I was guilty to you—guilty to Herbert!” And she covered her face with her hands.

“I don’t understand you,” said Clarence, withdrawing almost roughly her hands from her eyes. “Who is it—which of us is it that you love?”

“You, Lord Clarence, you!” she said, the words bursting from her lips, before she was

aware of what she did. Then, as the blood which flushed her cheek died away, she continued, in a sad but calm and firm voice: "But it is past: I must not, cannot be your wife."

Again there was a silence, and Isabel returned to her place, and began again nervously to play with the flowers. Suddenly Clarence came towards her, and his manner was changed.

"Are you not deceiving yourself as to your duty, Isabel?" he said, and the tone of his sadness was more melodious, more persuasive than ever his voice had been in its joy. "God knows I feel for Herbert Grey; but, if you love *me*, is not my right greater than his?" She shook her head. "Love is a sacred thing," he continued, yet more earnestly, "and cannot be commanded. Herbert Grey himself will not be satisfied with half your heart. Shall we not all then be wretched? Oh, Isabel! why have you drawn me towards you, only to cast me away again? Why have you shown me your nobleness, and your goodness, and

your purity, only to make my life more desolate?"

"Nobleness, goodness!...." she repeated, in a voice so full of shame and sorrow that the tears started into Clarence's eyes.

"Yes, I said it, and I say so still—the best, the brightest, the purest." Then, as self rose again, he burst forth, "Oh, Isabel! if you love me, you cannot make me so wretched! You have said you loved me—will you break my heart?"

"I am resolved," she said, almost sternly; for she feared that her strength was yielding to his misery; then, as her heart smote her for the words, "Oh, Lord Clarence!" she exclaimed, "forgive me!" and she held out her hand to him.

"You do not know what love is," he said, rudely. For an instant he held the hand she gave him, then hastily dropped it, and hurried away.

She made no effort to recall him; but, sitting down where he had left her, laid her head upon her hands.

“ Isabel,” said a voice, low and sad, beside her. She started up. “ I am come again, Isabel, because I would not part from you thus. I cannot judge what you have done. I may have been harsh ; but you must forgive me, for I know not what I do ; only, Isabel, we are parting, perhaps, for ever, and I would not go in anger. Wherever I am—wherever I go—I never, never can forget you, Isabel, dearest Isabel !”

“ Go !” she repeated, with ready alarm, catching at his words ; “ where are you going ? what do you mean to do ?”

“ I cannot tell—I cannot think now. God bless you, Isabel ! You shall hear from me, unless . . . unless I hear from you. Is there no hope ?” He fixed his eyes fondly, anxiously, earnestly, on her face ; those clear blue eyes, so bright in joy, so mournful now, as if to read some sign of relenting.

But, slowly and resolutely closing her eyes, to shut out that imploring gaze, she shook her head.

He wrung her hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

Oh! star of strength, I see thee stand,
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again.

LONGFELLOW.

The slow days passed away. The weariness and desolation of sorrow came over Isabel's heart; but she had motives for concealment, and she tried, to the uttermost, to be as gay as she had lately been. If she did not succeed, it created no uneasiness. Mr. and Mrs. Denison watched her anxiously, but not fearfully; they confidently expected that their wishes for her were about to be fulfilled.

One evening, about five days after her interview with Clarence, as she came home from a dinner to which she had dragged her weary body and wearier mind, a letter was put into

her hands; she hurried with it to her room—at any rate, she should hear from Clarence once more. She had begun to dread that he would go without a word or sign. The letter was as follows :—

Dover Street, Tuesday.

I said you should hear from me again, when my plans were arranged. They are settled now. I am going far, far away. Do not think me rash. I have thought much—I have not done it hastily; but so it must be. I know what life was before I knew you, Isabel—how wearisome, how insipid—I know what it will be now, when I have known and lost you—what—I dare not think. I cannot bear it. Sir William Seymour has offered to take me on his staff to India. We sail on Saturday. Again, I say, do not think me rash, or selfish. This is no new idea; once or twice before now I have been on the point of going there. God bless you, dearest Isabel! May I once more call you so? Forgive me, if I was harsh or violent; I did not

—I do not blame you. I have been too presumptuous; I had not a doubt—not a fear—I thought our hearts were clear as day to each other—it was a bright dream; but it is passed—I was unworthy of such happiness.

I try to think of you, happy with another; but I cannot do it. Forgive me, Isabel [Here followed some lines carefully scratched out.]

I would not give you pain—I would conceal from you how miserable I am; but I am selfish, and I must have you know, Isabel, how I have loved you, and how my heart is broken—unless sometimes I have wild visions that you will relent—that you will recall me—that we shall be happy—happier than ever! If it were so—but no I scarcely know what I say. God bless you, dearest Isabel! I shall not forget you in that far land to which I am going.

CLARENCE BROKE.

She pressed her hand to her eyes—to her heart—after reading this letter; then sate down to answer it.

I must not stop—I must not think—I hardly know now what is right, for I am very weak; but I feel I must not change—must not even tell you how wretched I am, except that wretchedness of knowing that you are unhappy. I think I must have done right, for I am very miserable. God bless you, Clarence! Take care of yourself—I may not say for my sake—but take care of yourself; and....I trust you may be happy. Forgive me.

ISABEL DENISON.

When Isabel went down to breakfast the following morning, Mr. Denison was standing in the window, with a letter in his hand, and his brow was clouded as if in anger. After a time, he sat down to breakfast, and again read the letter before he laid it beside him. He glanced at Isabel.

“What is this sudden fancy of Clarence’s going to India?” he said, looking earnestly at her. “Do you know anything of it, Isabel?”

“He told me he was going,” she murmured,

with a quivering lip, and her pale cheek grew scarlet.

The anger passed from her father's brow, though the gravity remained. He saw that his child was suffering—it was enough. They finished breakfast almost in silence. When it was over, Isabel wandered listlessly to the window, and stood there, in silent, painful thought. Mr. Denison joined her. He looked very grave.

“What is this, Isabel? Clarence is going. Why is it—is it your doing?”

She was silent.

“Answer me, Isabel—I desire it.”

“Oh, papa! in a few days I will tell you everything, if you will but trust me for a few days. I believe—I am almost sure—I am doing right. Will you trust me?”

“But then Clarence will be gone.” She was silent. “Answer me only this, Isabel. Does Clarence love you, and do you love him, my child?”

She attempted to answer, but the words died away. “Oh, papa! pray trust me,” she

said, imploringly, and the earnest look of her beautiful eyes few could resist. Mr. Denison could not.

“ I suppose I must let you have your own way,” he said, reluctantly ; “ but remember this, my dear child, there is no remorse so great as that of wounding the heart that loves you.” He spoke as if from his soul.

“ I know it, papa,” she said, in a low voice.

Mr. Denison looked anxiously at her downcast and troubled countenance, but it betrayed nothing more. He was at all times a great enemy to interference ; he hated it from others in his own concerns, and on this subject, at least, he acted on the rule—“ Do unto others as you would have them do to you ;” and, though angry, mortified, and disappointed, he thought it best to leave it for the present.

“ I have had a letter from Clarence this morning ; you may read it if you please ;” and, as he turned away, he placed it in her hands. She took it to her own room.

In this letter he merely told Mr. Denison

of his intention to go to India, saying it would be disagreeable to him to remain in England. "I am afraid," he concluded, "that the resignation of my seat in Parliament will be a disappointment to my father. I leave it therefore in your hands, with a request that you will tell him of it, and arrange about my resignation when I am gone. I suppose it cannot be till Parliament meets. I leave an address to my constituents with you, which I now enclose. I have arranged with my Cousin Hervey Broke, to stand, unless my brother should change his mind. My majority was so great that I think there will be no contest; but, if there should be, I have plenty of money to assist in it. Hervey is very glad to stand, and he is very popular. All my intentions are secret. I sail on Saturday, and go down to-night to my father; but I shall only tell him that I am going abroad. I leave everything in your hands."

Isabel laid down the letter with an oppression of heart such as she had not yet felt. It seemed as if she was bringing sorrow and dis-

appointment on all the world, and wild thoughts of change, of relenting, recalling, floated through her mind. There arose visions of herself as Clarence's happy wife, and Herbert was forgotten. She raised her eyes, bright and flashing, with the thought, and again they rested on the pure and holy brow of the picture, which hung opposite to the place where she was sitting. With a feeling of superstitious fear, she got up and stood before it; and with her gaze fixed on those serious, but serene eyes, she returned to the thought which but a moment before had made her happy. But their power was fading. Was it possible that she could thus forsake Herbert, and become Clarence's bright and happy wife? Shuddering, she shrunk from the thought. No, when Clarence was gone, she would go to him, she would tell him all, and then....

“And thou,” she said, mentally addressing the picture as if it were a living being, “hast thou known sorrow and care? Was that serene brow ever troubled with anguish? Were

the depths of those pure eyes ever agitated with earthly passions? Didst thou ever feel as we feel, and is it thy faith and thy love that causes thee to triumph thus?..." As she gazed, the unutterable calmness seemed to sink into her own soul, and the temptation passed away.

Nearly a week was gone, and Isabel had heard no more. A calmer sorrow had succeeded to the agitation of her spirit,—a hope which the young often feel had arisen, that something, some unforeseen event, would occur, to make them all happy—that it was unnatural to be so very miserable—that all would still turn out well.

In this mood of mind, which had been growing up for some days, she went down one morning to breakfast. Mrs. Denison was reading a letter as she went into the room, and her eyes were full of tears. After a moment she gave it to Mr. Denison, who laid it by his side. A cold chill struck on Isabel's heart, a vague terror came over her mind, but she sate down quietly as usual, and attempted to eat.

Mr. Denison spoke once or twice, but a weight seemed to lie upon the hearts of all. When breakfast was almost over, he got up, and laid the letter open before Isabel; it was dated,

The Amazon, Portsmouth, Monday,
Half-past four.

We are just off, but I could not leave England without thanking you and Emmeline a thousand, thousand times, for all your kindness to me. I have been very happy with you all, and I shall not easily forget it. It was more than I deserved, more than I am ever likely to meet with again. God bless you all!

CLARENCE BROKE.

The letter lay there before her, but tears so blinded her eyes that she scarcely could read a line. Clarence was gone—actually gone,—that was all she saw. She bent her head over the table to conceal her face, to gain time to master the emotion of her breaking heart; but the excitement of over-wrought feeling would not this once be controlled, and,

suddenly starting up, she hurried out of the room.

Mr. Denison shook his head, and put his hand over his eyes. "I cannot understand it," he said, at last. "You must go to her, Emmeline, and see if you can make it out. I am afraid I was wrong to leave her to herself."

Mrs. Denison softly opened the door of Isabel's room, then stopped, pained, and shocked, at the sight of her excessive sorrow. She was one of those who rarely, very rarely shed tears, and when "the waters of her heart's lone awful world" did rise, the violence of their agitation, the agony of their falling, was very different from the calming effect of tears on those who shed them easily and naturally. To her they were

" Storm of the heart, from troubled fountain gushing,
Wild burning tear ;
From inward passion to the surface rushing,
Convulsive there,
Expressing all the stormy spirit's woe,
Working below."

She was now half sitting, half lying, on her

bed, weeping as passionately as a child. She did not hear the door open, did not see Mrs. Denison till Emmeline stood close beside her and gently touched her arm; but at the sight she was calm at once, and, humbled and ashamed, stood up before her.

“Don’t look at me, don’t think of me,” she said, imploringly; “don’t tell papa that you found me so unhappy. I will come down to him directly, and confess to him everything; will you go and tell him so? Dear Mrs. Denison, don’t think very ill of me for this!”

“Why should I think ill of you, dear Isabel?” she said, gently; “I only wish that you would confide in me, and that I could help you. It is not right, it is not kind, to keep all your sorrow to yourself. I will not stay now, I am sure you had rather be alone. I only came from your father. Will you remember, dearest, how anxious he is about you, and try not to make him unhappy?”

“I will come directly; I will remember, indeed, I will. I am afraid I am very selfish.

Oh, Herbert, Herbert!" she said, as Mrs. Denison closed the door, going despairingly towards the picture which was so entirely associated with him in her mind, "if you knew how wretched I am, I am sure you would pity and forgive me!"

About half an hour afterwards, having washed her face and smoothed her hair, and, as far as she could, banished the traces of her sorrow, she went down to her father's room. Mr. Denison was walking up and down the room, awaiting her, in apparently great perturbation of spirit. As she came in, he sate down. She went and stood by a table near him.

"Well, Isabel," he said, after a silence, "what is all this? why is Clarence gone?"

"I am come to tell you, papa," and she stopped.

"Won't you sit down, my dear child," he said, more tenderly, as he saw how her limbs trembled.

"No, thank you, papa, I had rather stand; I will tell you all directly. Last year, before

you came to England, I made acquaintance with Mr. Herbert Grey. After a time we were engaged to be married, for I loved him, or I thought I did."

"Who is Mr. Herbert Grey?" asked her father, without any comment, or expression of surprise.

"I don't know exactly; he is the son of some General Grey, but I knew him as curate of Ellerton." She paused, but Mr. Denison made no further remark, and she went on again. "When you sent for me, papa, he released me from my engagement; for, indeed, he is very good. He said you might not approve—that I might change—that we must be free—and we were free." Here she came to a dead stop.

"And you have changed, Isabel? Is that what you would say? This does not surprise me. But why, on earth," he continued, rather impatiently, "being thus free, and preferring, as I suppose, Clarence to this Mr. Grey — why, on earth, have you let Clarence go?"

“ Oh ! papa, I was free in word ; but was I, could I be free in honour ? I told him,” she added, in a voice of shame and misery, “ that it was impossible I could forget him, and now....”

“ And now you have forgotten him. This does not seem to me very surprising—it could hardly have been otherwise.”

“ But it should have been otherwise,” she said, eagerly. “ Oh ! papa, you do not know Herbert Grey, how good, how noble he is ! He will not blame me — he will release me, I know. This is what makes me doubly wretched. If he did not love me so much as to forget himself, I think I could bear it better.”

Mr. Denison was touched by her tone of sorrow and remorse. “ You do not wish to marry Mr. Grey, then, my child ? Tell me what you wish.”

“ Oh ! no, papa, I *could not* marry him now—every vow would be false.....unless he commanded it,” she added, after a moment’s pause ; “ but he will not do that. No, it is

easy now. Since Clarence is gone, I can go to him with my misery, and tell him all."

Mr. Denison was a man of deep, and occasionally, violent feeling; but the sufferings of one like Isabel he did not understand. He could not even imagine her sense of degradation, as she thought of her broken faith, or the bitterness of her anguish in the remembrance of all the sorrow she had caused. He was touched, however, by her looks of hopeless wretchedness, and a strange likeness to his own early history affected him more than he was willing to show. Her sacrifice, also, though he called it romantic, though he would himself have been incapable of it, perhaps for that reason he admired the more. He got up and walked to the window, and stood there in deep thought.

After a few minutes, Isabel approached him. "Have I grieved you, too, papa? I think I can bear everything but that; but I cannot bear to grieve, to disappoint you."

"No, my child," he said, in a tone of great affection, "you have not grieved me, ex-

cept so far as I am grieved to see you unhappy.”

“ And do you blame me, papa, very, very much ?”

“ No, Isabel—you have acted ‘ not wisely,’ perhaps,” and he smiled slightly, “ ‘ but too well;’ I mean, as regards this last part of the business. For the other, you know better than I do what you have done.” She made a movement as if her former conduct were past reproach, past judgment. “ Go now, my child, and lie down...If I blame you, which I have scarcely a right to do, believe me, I feel for you more than I blame.” He kissed her affectionately; and, with a mind in some degree calmed and relieved by her father’s kindness and her father’s love, she left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

I am not what I was—the time's gone by,
When, bright and cloudless as the summer's sky,
 My day of life began ;
When all was music to my raptured ear,
And, bounding onward without grief or fear,
Eager my course I ran.

I am not what I was—the sense of youth,
And hope, and joyous feeling, and the truth
 Of earth hath passed away ;
The heart that once throbbed high with health and life
Beats faint and wearied with the ceaseless strife
 Which there has held its sway.

G. B.

With some little difficulty, Isabel obtained Mr. Denison's leave to go down to Ellerton. He dreaded the agitation for her excited mind, but she urged her request so vehemently that at last he gave way.

To see Herbert, however painful it might be, herself—to tell him all, not by letter, but

by word;—this she felt would make the whole difference, at the present time and in future, both to herself and to him.

It was at the latter end of August that she set out, with a heavy heart, upon her journey.

“You have a finer day for your journey than we had, when we travelled together a few months ago,” said Charles Denison, as he put her into the carriage. “May it have as prosperous an end!” and he kindly pressed her hand. He had received some inkling from Mrs. Denison as to the cause of this sudden visit to Ellerton.

Annie, who accompanied her young mistress, was in a state of most violent excitement, partly at returning with her grandeur and her knowledge of the world to her native village, but still more with curiosity to know what the exact cause of this return could be.

Clarence's departure and Isabel's pale cheeks had given rise, as might be expected, to much interest and speculation on the part of the servants; but they had been unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion, till

Annie's hints of "such a handsome young man" in the country, and this sudden journey to Ellerton, began to throw some light on the question. Even now, however, it was wrapt in great darkness, for Isabel's appearance was not much like that of a girl's happy return to a happy lover; and Annie's mind was bursting into the desire to obtain some information. She was in consequence very much disposed to be communicative; and Isabel, who rarely checked her, found it difficult to check her now. At last, saying, and most truly, that she had a bad headache, she asked Annie if she would like to read, and, handing her the "Quarterly Review," which she had provided for herself as a defence against her companions' conversational powers, she threw herself back in the carriage, for the indulgence of her own sad thoughts. It might as well have been Greek as English, so far as Annie's understanding was concerned; but she thought it rather grand to read it, and turned over the pages for some time with great interest. As they drew near to Ellerton,

however, her excitement could no longer be controlled. It was just dusk. Isabel had left London late, in order to be late at Ellerton, to escape curious eyes, and, still more, to escape for one night the dreaded meeting with Herbert. She was rather troubled at the bright twilight which followed, in the country, the glorious sunny day. For the last few miles, Annie passed her time in exclamations, assurances that they were just there, and impatience at every fresh disappointment. At last, after many failures, her prophetic powers were justified — they *were* just there. As they swept round a corner, they came in sight of the tower of the old church.

“And there’s the pond and the willows, miss!” said Annie, with a scream: “I declare I remember it all as if it was yesterday.”

“It would be strange indeed if you had forgotten it,” said Isabel, smiling.

“I don’t know that, miss—it isn’t everybody who sees the world and comes back unaltered to their native air.”

Isabel felt a strange rebuke in the words, and was silent.

Annie popped her head out of the window. "There's Mr. Grey, I do declare!"

The blood rushed violently to Isabel's heart and to her cheeks. She had never even contemplated such a meeting as this. "Oh! no," continued Annie, perfectly unconscious of the pain her remarks had given, "I'm sure, I beg Mr. Grey's pardon — it was the long legs as misled me; it's only young Mr. Cox, the brewer."

At last, they drew up at the cottage door. Isabel had given no hint even of the likelihood of her visit. Attracted by the unusual sound, Mrs. and Miss Shepherd came to the window; the next moment she was in their arms. Miss Shepherd was silent from surprise and joy; and even Mrs. Shepherd could only exclaim, once or twice, with great fervour, "Bless me! bless my soul!"

"Let me be alone with you this night," said Isabel, as she saw Mrs. Shepherd's eyes straining down the hill, as if they could pene-

trate into Mr. Price's house; "shall it not be so, Aunt Rachel?"

"Very well, my dear, that is just what I feel myself, and I am very glad you feel it, too; for I was just thinking what a many friends there are in Ellerton would be glad to come up and drink tea with you to-night; and no wonder, my dear, considering how long it is since we've seen you. But, bless me! what do we stand here for?" and she led the way into the house.

"Ellerton is very lovely, Aunt Rachel," said Isabel, turning again, as she stood in the doorway, to gaze.

"Do you still think so, my dear child?" said her aunt; and a smile of unusual brightness passed over her face.

An hour afterwards, they sate at tea in the little drawing-room. The familiar appearance of her childhood's home, the loving eyes that rested upon her face, the fresh, soft, perfumed air of the country, which blew in at the open trelliced window—all assisted to calm Isabel's mind; and, with the strange elastic power of

youth, she seemed for the time to throw off the weight of her sorrow, and entered with amusement, if not with interest, into the news of the place, which Mrs. Shepherd detailed for her advantage.

“ Well, my dear Charlotte was safely confined this morning. You had not heard the news, I suppose?—no, how should you? And so she’s got twins this time.”

“ Twins!” repeated Isabel, in horror.

“ Well, my dear, I was surprised too, when first I heard of it. Not quite a year since Sarah Jane was born; but we can’t always settle these things just as we please, and I dare say it’s for the best, as I tell Charlotte. I was surprised, though, when she first mentioned it to me. I don’t mean the twins; of course she did not mention that.”

“ I hope, at any rate, that they are little boys,” inquired Isabel.

“ So I hoped, my dear, and so I expected; and I told Charlotte that it would be so—that is, I thought there would be one boy; I never thought of the twins—*that* was quite a sur-

prise : but I was wrong, as I am sometimes—two little girls ! Charlotte is very much disappointed indeed, but Mr. Jones laughs about it. He says he shall call them Silly and Cherubs. I didn't quite understand why, but he likes his joke."

"Scylla and Charibdis," said Rachel, smiling quietly.

"All the other little things are quite well. Amy says, every day, 'When will Isabel come back to me?' She misses you very much, my dear ; so we all do ; but no matter about that now. Let me see—I suppose Rachel told you that Elizabeth Chapman is going to be married to young Mr. Franklin?"

"No, she didn't. Aunt Rachel very seldom tells me any news ; but I'm very glad to hear this. What does Miss Bridges say to it?"

"I don't much think she likes it," said Mrs. Shepherd, confidentially. "She said that she thought Mr. Franklin had made a bad choice—that Laura was much the sweeter girl of the two. Now, my dear Elizabeth is worth six of Laura, we think."

“ So do I,” said Isabel, smiling; “ Laura is the cleverest, but Elizabeth is a good girl.”

“ Yes, my dear, exactly. I know you always think as we do. How happy it makes me to see you here again, quite unchanged!” Isabel’s brow clouded at once. “ Just the same; a little paler, perhaps; but that may be the heat. I felt it hot myself, when I was in the sun.”

“ Did you expect to find me changed?” asked Isabel, sadly:

“ No, my dear, I never thought you would change. Rachel, sometimes, and Mr. Grey once, did say that we must not be surprised if you were not quite the same; but they will see I was right, won’t they, my dear?”

Mrs. Shepherd did not wait for an answer, and *her* eyes did not see the deep blush which was the silent reply to her question.

When they went up to bed, Rachel followed Isabel to her room, and, setting down her candle on the table, approached her, and looked anxiously in her face.

“ I am not deceived, Isabel—you are not

happy, dearest—tell me what is the matter with you.”

Isabel withdrew from the light, and, sitting down in the window-seat, looked out into the night. “I was going to you presently, Aunt Rachel, to talk to you.” She paused. “Did you then expect to find me changed?” she asked, after a moment, in a faltering voice.

Rachel looked earnestly at her niece, and a fear shot through her mind, but she answered, with her usual calm voice, “No, my dear Isabel. I thought it possible, but I did not, I do not, expect it.”

“But it is so, Aunt Rachel! I am changed, utterly changed. Oh, do not despise me!” and, turning her head away, in a rapid manner, she told her sad history.

Miss Shepherd was surprised and shocked; but, for the first time, her love for Isabel made her seek for excuses before she unflinchingly condemned error.

“I think you are needlessly unhappy, dearest. The world is often exciting and dazzling at first, but with you, Isabel, it can-

not be so for long. All this will pass away, and then Herbert will be more to you than ever."

"No, Aunt Rachel," she said, shaking her head, mournfully; "that will not be—that which I feel cannot pass away. It is not the world that blinds me; it is, that another, that love for another, has taken away all my heart from him."

"But think how you once loved Herbert. Surely, Isabel, the past cannot all be forgotten."

"Forgotten! no. Would that it could!" She paused, then got up, and laid her hand on Miss Shepherd's arm. For an instant she raised her large melancholy eyes to her face, then fixed them on the ground.

"Hear me, Aunt Rachel," she said, almost solemnly. "I love Lord Clarence as I never loved Herbert: so different is the feeling, that I sometimes doubt if I ever loved Herbert at all. When Herbert was with me, my thoughts often wandered from him; when he was absent, they were not always following him. Now, sleeping or waking, alone, or with

others, my thoughts are always with Clarence. I often wished that Herbert had been other than he was: often and often, when he was grave, I wished he would smile, and be more gay. Now, though I know that Clarence is not perfect, he is perfect to me. Whatever he says, or looks, or does, I would not have him otherwise than he is. If Herbert had left me, and had loved another, I should have been indignant, proud, angry; I should have had power to be so. Now, if Clarence ever should love another..." she paused, and closed her eyes, and the sentence was not finished. "I sometimes think," she continued, and she raised her eyes, and a crimson blush covered her whole face, "that it is not love, but idolatry."

"But Isabel, my child..." Miss Shepherd began.

"I know what you would say," she interrupted, in the same unusual, excited manner; "I know how wrong it is to feel, to speak, as I do—you cannot blame me more than I blame myself. It is not to boast of it that I have

told you this, but only that you may know that it is in vain to plead, in vain to speak—it is impossible that I can love Herbert again. I know how wrong it is,” and her manner changed to one of deep sadness; “and now the time is come to overcome it, and to suffer for it;” and, as she spoke, a single tear fell slowly down her cheek.

Rachel made no remark—no reproach—offered no advice. She sighed deeply, such a sigh as persons of a calm, strong nature, who have no experience in, who perhaps are not capable of, the more violent emotions, heave for those whom they behold suffering under the mysterious agitations of passions unknown to themselves.

At length she took up her candle, and kissed Isabel with unusual tenderness. “Sleep, my dearest child,” she said; “I will pray for you.”

CHAPTER XVII.

None can deem harshlier of me than I deem.

BYRON.

Si tu savais comme je t'aime,
Bien sur toi-même tu m'aimerais.

Romance.

Better trust all and be deceived,
And weep that trust, and that deceiving,
Than doubt one heart that, if believed,
Had blessed one's life with that believing.

MRS. BUTLER.

Early on the following morning, Isabel sent to announce her arrival to Herbert Grey, and begged that he would come to see her at twelve o'clock.

It is not to be supposed that the news of her coming had reached him then for the first time. He had heard of it the night before, with wonder and instinctive fear; but he waited—he would not, by seeking her un-

summoned, seem to remind her of the rights which he had renounced.

She closed the shutters of the little drawing-room, and sate down on the sofa to await him. As the clock struck twelve, he was in the room; and, after a separation of nine months, they who had parted, free indeed, and yet as plighted, promised lovers, met again.

Isabel got up to receive him, as he advanced to take her hand; but she made no step forward—the hand he took on that burning summer-day was cold as ice—it seemed to chill him to the heart. He dropped it, and sate down in silence at the table opposite to her. The silence continued: what words of common intercourse, what events of common life, could interest hearts occupied like these?

But, though in silence, Herbert perused the pale and suffering countenance of her he loved so truly; and while the feelings he read there made his own heart beat with fear and anguish, his thought was only of her.

He spoke at last. “ You have come back

to Ellerton in sorrow, dearest Isabel. Will you not speak to me? You are unhappy—will you not let me comfort you?”

The gentle, earnest tones of his voice thrilled through her soul, and she could not answer him—she could not break his heart.

He saw her increasing agitation; and though every moment added to the turmoil in his own breast—though the voice of selfish fear called upon him louder and louder, still his thought, his anxiety, was for her. He got up, and sate on the sofa beside her.

“What is it, dearest Isabel? Will you not speak to me?” He paused. “Do not fear; I am prepared for everything you can tell me.”

“Are you prepared, Herbert,” she said, looking suddenly up—“are you prepared to know that I am false, false—that I have forgotten you—that I love another?”

The confession was made—she had forced herself to meet the eyes of him whom she had forsaken; now, burying her face in her hands, she laid her head upon the table, while a sigh

of mingled shame, anguish, and relief, burst as from the depths of her heart.

There was a long silence. She was startled by the sound of the door closing. She looked up—Herbert was gone.

Prepared as he had thought himself for this—for all things—though he had schooled himself to believe that it might—that it would be so; yet how large a portion of hope is there in what we call hopelessness! He could not now hear from her own lips that he was forgotten—he could not sit beside her, and feel that she was lost to him for ever, without an agony which threatened to overmaster him. But still it was of her he thought. She should not know what her faithlessness cost him — his uncontrollable anguish she should not see—in solitude it should have its sway—in solitude it should be conquered—and then he would return and comfort her.

And truly it was well; for had she seen Herbert in the loneliness of his own room—Herbert, strong, self-possessed, and holy as he was, it must have broken her heart. Evil

spirits, which long since he thought had left him, never to return, came to him in that hour—spirits of burning jealousy, hatred, and revenge—repinings at his own hard fate—doomed, as he seemed, to love so passionately, and never to be loved!—dark, doubting, despairing thoughts of rebellion and distrust—the worst, the dreariest attendants of the hours of trial.

In solitude these enemies were met—in solitude they were conquered. The storm and tempest of passion past, and hope and confidence came again—that all things, even this last, most bitter cup, were ordered for his good.

Almost immediately on leaving the cottage, he had sent a note to Miss Shepherd, to beg that Isabel might not be distressed about him. He would not conceal from her, he said, that it cost him a pang to resign her, which was best struggled with alone; but that, in the evening, he should be quite himself, and he hoped he might come to her again, and assist her, if it was in his power.

Isabel sate in the same place, in the bright twilight of that evening, awaiting Herbert's return. The hours had passed—how she knew not; she was too wretched even to think. And again he stood before her, and, as he took her hand, he smiled upon her. Though he tried, however, to the uttermost, he could not efface the marks which the struggles of the day had left upon his face, and she shuddered as she saw the deadly paleness of his cheek.

“Oh, Herbert! why do you smile—why do you look so kindly at me? I should not be so miserable if you would but reproach me.”

“I have nothing to reproach you with, dearest Isabel. You chose me in comparative solitude, when you had seen none but me; I knew it would be thus when you met with others more worthy of you. I would have made you happy—I must have made you happy, if....” he paused, for he feared to say anything that might wound her....“if I had been allowed to do so; but my best, my only

wish is for your happiness. Selfish thoughts will intrude; but, believe me, dearest Isabel, if you are happy, I shall be happy, too."

"I cannot bear this," said Isabel, rising hastily from the place where she sate, and walking to the window. "You make me feel so utterly—utterly selfish!"

As she stood there, thoughts of yielding—of sacrificing herself—passed quickly through her mind. What sorrow in the world could be greater than that which she felt in that moment! She threw open the window wider, and gazed on the rays of lingering sunshine still streaking the sky, while the evening air blew calmly and freshly upon her face; and, as she gazed, a sunshine on the sea, and a breeze from the ocean, came into her mind, and Clarence....Clarence....

She walked back to the sofa. "Oh! Herbert!" she said, as she sate down again, with an expression of hopeless sorrow, "you do not know how miserable I am."

He had not moved—he almost started now. "If it is about me, Isabel, be miserable no

more. If it is about another—will you not tell me all, dearest? I would assist you, or I would comfort you. Will you tell me who is so happy?" he asked, in a voice which trembled in spite of himself.

"No matter who; he is not happy—he is gone far, far away."

"Gone!" and a flash of hope, sharp and agonizing as despair, so wild, so short, its gleam, shot through his breast.

"You did not think I had forsaken you, and was going to marry another, Herbert? No, whatever I may be, not so false, not so heartless as that. No," she continued, rising again, and standing before him; "I do not acknowledge myself to be free—bound to you, Herbert, by every tie of honour and of gratitude; and yet it is to you yourself that I come to confess my love for another, and to ask you to forgive and to release me. Hear me, Herbert, hear me," she continued, "I love him, even as I think you love me. I am in your hands—I will do whatever you command me." As she spoke, as if by an impulse

she could not resist, with her arms crossed and her head sunk, she knelt at his feet.

For a moment, he did not attempt to answer her—he did not raise her from the ground; for a moment he pressed his hand to his throbbing brow to still the tumult of his thoughts; for, in that hour of her faithlessness, and even with the confession of it upon her lips, he felt that she was dearer, far dearer than ever. Then, in the dead silence of the room, sweet and clear his answer came, and, as it rose above her head, it sounded to her ears as the voice of an angel.

“ I thank you, Isabel, I thank you for your confidence, your openness, your truth; the world can never be dark to me, while such as you inhabit it. You are free, if indeed you wait my words to release you, and may God give you happiness! You have my forgiveness, dearest, though you need it not, for I have nothing to forgive; and, while life endures,” he continued, in a voice still clear, though it began to tremble, “ you shall have my prayers and my blessing. Take it,” he

said, and, rising and gently laying his hand upon her bended head, he spoke the words of peace and blessing, which, before now, have stilled many a tried and broken heart.

As he concluded, he turned to go abruptly, for he felt as if a parting he could not endure. But Isabel stopped him in the doorway.

“I will not detain you, Herbert,” she said, gently and humbly, “only I would tell you—I must tell you—how I thank you and bless you.” As she spoke, she took his burning hand in her cold grasp. He cast upon her one last long look, and was gone. As the door closed, and the excitement passed, Isabel fell lifeless on the ground.

Mrs. Shepherd and Rachel sate in the small back room. Rachel had taken this opportunity to break the change to her aunt, with an unconscious tone of kindness and excuse for Isabel; and the communication made, she sate in this anxious hour, hearing, but not listening to, the questions, exclamations, and remarks, which fell from the old lady.

“ Bless me ! you don’t say so ? Poor thing ! and is this the cause of her pale cheeks, and her eyes, which make me sad to look at ? Bless me, what a change ! I always knew how it would be ; I never liked this London business, I never did. What business had a fine young man to make mischief in this way ? What will Herbert do now ? Bless my soul, I suppose I must call him Mr. Grey again ! He’ll want a wife sadly, after thinking he’d got one for so long. Well-a-day ! I never thought of this ! ”

Rachel sate in deep thought. The blow she had received from her child, her pupil, was great indeed — but love for Isabel conquered in the struggle with the condemnation of her weakness. Her thoughts were of the disappointments of life — of the dangers of the world.

The door slowly opened, and Herbert stood in the entrance—so changed his face, it cut Rachel to the soul.

“ You had better go to Isabel, Miss Shepherd,” he said, in a very low voice : “ I am sure she is very tired.”

He half turned to go, then silently came back, and shook the hand of each.

“ Bless me, if Herbert don't look just like a ghost !” exclaimed Mrs. Shepherd, with tears in her eyes.

“ Oh, Isabel ! I cannot forgive you !” cried Rachel, as she hurried to her niece.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The nymph must lose her female friend,
If more admired than she.

COWPER.

It was the morning after the meeting and the parting of Herbert Grey and Isabel.

The two Miss Chapmans sate in the little room fronting the street. Laura, as usual, was leaning against the window. Elizabeth, who, since her attachment and consequent engagement to Mr. Franklin, a sensible young man, had become much more discreet, was working at the other end of the room.

After two or three comments on what was passing in the street, Laura called to her sister—

“ Here comes Matilda Bridges. I’ll bet any

money she comes to see if she can find out anything about Miss Denison!"

Miss Bridges came hastily into the room. She had a peculiarly noisy, bustling way of walking. "How d'ye do, Laura? — Good morning, Elizabeth. Well, is there anything to see?" As she joined Laura at the window, "Have you seen Miss Denison yet?"

"I said you came about that," remarked Laura: "I knew you would be curious."

"Curious?—why, yes, it is a very curious proceeding, indeed. Here she has been away for nearly a year, and suddenly down she comes, shuts herself up in the cottage—nobody is allowed to set eyes on her, and, as I hear, she goes again to-morrow! It is very curious—and I can't say I like it, or understand it."

"I see nothing to understand," observed Elizabeth. "She came down to see her aunt, and very properly."

"Oh, yes! very dutiful, indeed; but people don't come down in this way on duty, at the risk of sending their relations into fits."

“That’s all nonsense, Matilda,” said Laura : “you know very well Miss Shepherd would not go into a fit if we all lay down, and died in her presence, — but I’m quite of your opinion, Miss Denison came down on some other business. Do you know, I think you were wrong, after all: I suspect very much that there is something going on with Mr. Grey.”

“No, you don’t say so?” said Miss Bridges, fidgeting. “What have you seen?—have you heard anything?—I always did say, you know, that she tried to get hold of him, the way she put her eyes up was quite shocking to see.”

“There never was any doubt that Mr. Grey paid attentions to Miss Denison,” again observed Elizabeth, perhaps not without a secret pleasure in tormenting Miss Bridges.

The latter took no notice of the remark, but again eagerly appealed to Laura for her information.

“Oh, I didn’t see much, but I’m quite sure of this—Mr. Grey had a note from the cottage early yesterday morning, for I saw the boy

come down the hill with it, and Mr. Grey's boy took it in. Well, later in the day, I was just looking out again, and I saw Mr. Grey, my goodness! so white, and walking so quick, come down the hill, and go into the house, and then he shut the window of his room, quite with a jar. I heard it here."

"Good gracious! Laura, what can it all be about? I wish you had sent for me yesterday: I'm sure I should have made out something. Have you seen Mr. Grey, to-day?"

"No, though I have been watching all the morning. He never once has opened his window, though it is so hot, and I don't think he can have gone out without my seeing him."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Miss Bridges, after some thought. "Miss Denison has found somebody else to flirt with, and Mr. Grey has heard of it. What do you think?—I never thought she would be satisfied with one person, with those eyes of hers, if she could have more."

"Oh, good gracious, Elizabeth!—come here!" screamed Laura, "here is Miss Deni-

son, herself, walking down the street with Miss Shepherd. Come, and look."

Elizabeth was interested enough to go to the window for an instant. There was, perhaps, a little affectation of superiority to very natural curiosity, in the single glance she gave, and the immediate return to her work.

"Well, I never saw anything equal to this," said Miss Bridges, "parading the streets of Ellerton, in such a dress! I suppose she thinks we shall be envious of her finery."

"I can't say I see anything very fine," said Laura, goodnaturedly. "Miss Denison was always fond of white, and a black scarf and a straw bonnet is not so very grand. What pretty green ribbons!"

"I didn't say she was fine, but she thinks she is, marching along with her six flounces, I do believe. I wouldn't have her think I was looking at her, for the whole world!" And, with a pang of virtuous self-denial, Miss Bridges tore herself from the window.

"My goodness, Elizabeth, she's coming in!" screamed Laura. "Here, make haste—

just settle my gown." In her agitated escape from the window, she overset one table and two chairs, while Miss Bridges trod on the little dog's tail.

In compliance with her aunt's earnest request, Isabel had so far consented to avoid the imputation of being a fine lady, as to agree to call on Mrs. Chapman, the principal inhabitant of the place, and to allow Mr. Price to be invited to tea; but it was an effort to her greater than her aunt could imagine or understand. They staid in Mrs. Chapman's house only a few minutes, Isabel saying she was hurried, as her stay was so short. When they got up, and were just going, she went to Elizabeth Chapman, and said a few kind words of congratulation on her approaching marriage; and, as she wished her good bye, slipped a little trinket into her hand.

"Well," said Miss Bridges, after they had a little recovered from the excitement of the visit, "if that is what London does, I only thank my goodness that I'm not forced to go there."

“ Miss Denison does look ill,” said Elizabeth; “ but I thought her prettier than ever; she looks so gentle to-day, but how sad! and there was quite a rim of black round her eyes.”

“ Oh, she looks a perfect fright!” said Miss Bridges, in a tone of great satisfaction. “ I’m glad I happened to be here to see her. As to being sad, I take it she’s disappointed at not finding a husband at all those parties and balls which she’s at night and day, as I see in the papers, but *she* won’t find husbands as thick as blackberries, I can tell her. I wouldn’t marry Miss Denison for the whole world!” and she cast up her hands and eyes as she spoke.

“ You would, though, to have such a pretty thing as this ;” and Elizabeth held the little trinket before her eyes. It was a turquoise bird, with diamond eyes, which Isabel had selected from among her many little jewels.

Miss Bridges and Laura were up in a moment. “ Good gracious, Elizabeth! where did you get that? what a sweet little thing! Did Miss Denison give you that?”

“ I must say, Matilda,” said Laura, as she twisted it about in her fingers, “ that this is very goodnatured of Miss Denison.”

“ Oh, yes, very goodnatured indeed ! Miss Denison knows when to be goodnatured—she doesn’t quite want brains. Think how fine she felt coming down in this condescending way to give a wedding gift to Elizabeth, knowing well enough all the place would hear of it. I only thank my goodness that I’m not going to be married—it would have made me quite sick to take anything from her !” and her eyes fell enviously on the little sparkling ornament.

“ She wouldn’t have given you anything if you had been going to be married,” remarked Laura, coolly. “ I don’t think she ever liked you.”

“ No, I dare say she did not,” said Miss Bridges, with extreme sharpness. “ I should have been surprised if she had. Miss Denison doesn’t quite want brains—I never could stand her airs and her nonsense, and I showed it pretty plainly. I’m not one of those who are

taken in by every polite speech that is made to them by women! No," with a glance at Elizabeth, "nor by men either."

"I suppose that's because you so seldom have them," said Laura, in a very civil tone. "They surprise you too much to believe them."

The conversation of the young ladies was growing interesting. Miss Bridges, with a very red face, was gathering herself up to say something unspeakably bitter, when Laura, who had merely followed the whim of the moment, and had no wish to quarrel, hurriedly called her back to the window.

"Come quick, Matilda, quick. Mr. Grey must be going out riding; his horse is at the door, and he never keeps it waiting."

Miss Bridges again trod on the poor little dog in her hasty rush to the window, to see Mr. Grey, after the interesting suspicions excited by Laura's information. She was just in time to see what was to be seen, which, however, was nothing very unusual. Herbert came out of the house, stood by his horse for

a moment, and patted it, to which the animal replied, by an affectionate glance, as it seemed, into his face. Then, looking neither to the right nor to the left, he got up and rode away.

“Good gracious! Well, I’m glad I’ve seen him! I wonder where he is going? he does look very white, to be sure! At any rate, he is not going to the cottage. Poor Miss Denison! I suppose she came out to look for him. Well, good bye, Laura: I shall come again to-morrow. Good bye, Elizabeth: I hope, when I marry, that I shan’t have to sit so close to my work as you do. No, thank you, no marriage for me, if it is to turn me into a lady’s maid!” And, hoping she had said something uncomfortable, Miss Bridges departed in restored good humour.

CHAPTER XIX.

Each in his hidden sphere of joy and woe
Our hermit spirits dwell, and range apart ;
Our eyes see all around, in gloom or glow,
Hues of their own, fresh gathered from the heart.

The Christian Year.

In the autumn of this year, Mr. Denison took his wife and daughter to spend the winter in Italy. The health of Mrs. Denison, which had been injured alike by the heat of India and the cold of England, improved so rapidly during their stay abroad, that Mr. Denison determined to give her the benefit of a farther trial of the air of the "sweet south." Leaving her and Isabel in Switzerland, he came himself to London, for attendance in Parliament, and rejoined them towards the end of July; and, after touring for a few months in France and Germany, returned again to Rome for the winter.

It was late in the spring of the year following that they came to England for good. A few days after their arrival, the following correspondence passed between Isabel and Miss Shepherd.

Grosvenor Square,
May 27.

My dearest Aunt Rachel,

We arrived in London on Saturday evening, after a very long journey, and a very rough passage. Mrs. Denison, however, does not seem to be the least tired, and you know that I never feel weary, or any thing of the kind. You cannot think how much Mrs. Denison's health is improved; so our long stay abroad has not been quite useless. I suppose I ought to think that we are improved in many ways. We certainly are very clever now, and Mrs. Denison and I talk Italian and German in the most beautiful style. And Annie, too—I think you would laugh to hear her French conversation. She has managed to pick up a good deal of something, though

I am not quite sure if the French would own it for their language.

London is looking just the same as it did two years ago. I took a long walk with papa, yesterday evening, and we met a great many old friends. Everybody seems to be so full of life and enjoyment. I do not know why it struck me so much, but I could not help wondering what was passing in the minds of those who seemed so gay and careless.

I hope, dear Aunt Rachel, soon to go down to Ellerton, but just at present papa wants me to assist him in arranging the books and pictures, and numberless pretty things which he has brought from Italy, so I shall not propose my visit for a week or two. You cannot think what papa's kindness to me has been. I often wonder how it is that I have such a happiness, when I deserve so very, very little.

“ And now, Aunt Rachel, I must ask you to tell me something about Mr. Grey. You have never mentioned him since he left Ellerton, and then your letter made me very

sad. I have been hoping, for a year or more, that you would soon say something to cheer me—but whether it would cheer me or not, will you tell me *exactly* what you think, for you must have seen him, or heard of him. Pray do, for I am anxious and fanciful sometimes, and our fancies are always worse than the truth, whatever that may be.

Give my very best love to Mrs. Shepherd. I have some china ornaments for her glass cupboard, which I hope are curious enough even to suit her taste; but I must wait till I can go myself to arrange them for her.

God bless you, dear Aunt Rachel! pray write to me soon.

Your most affectionate,
ISABEL DENISON.

Ellerton, May the 29th.

My dearest Isabel,

It made me very happy to see the date of your letter from London, again. I have not much opportunity of seeing you when you are in England, but still I felt that Italy

was very far away. I hope you are not holding out a vain hope of soon being able to come down to Ellerton.

I fancy that you too are glad to be in England again. I hope you are well, dear Isabel, but it strikes me that you write sadly. I was looking at your letter of yesterday, compared with one I had from you about this time two years ago. They are very different; and yet, dear Isabel, I think you are too young to be so much changed. I am not fond of the dissipations of the world, and yet I could almost be glad to hear that you were taking some pleasure in them. You are too young to be sad, my dear child: it is a bad thing to let melancholy grow into a habit—it unfits us for the daily duties of our life. Do think of this, and try to enjoy your health and strength, and many blessings.

You reproach me for being silent about Herbert. The fact is, dear Isabel, I very seldom hear of him. He has been at D—— for above a year, and until now I have never seen and rarely heard of him during all that

time. Mr. Price says he is a very bad correspondent. This last week, however, he has been here for a few days, and I saw him both yesterday and the day before. He sate with us for about half an hour. You ask me so earnestly to tell you whatever I know about him, that I will tell you exactly what I think, though perhaps it may give you pain. The first day that he came to see us, he was rather silent—I think he felt being in that room again after so long an absence. He never mentioned your name but once, and that was to inquire where you now were, and even that seemed to be an effort to him. When I said that you were either come, or just coming to England, he became more silent still, and very soon went away. Yesterday he talked rather more, and gave us some account of the state of his parish. My aunt questioned him about his house, and he said it was a nice one. You know she is not always very discreet in what she says, so she advised him to give a mistress to his house, or made some remark of that kind. He seemed quite to shudder,

and a moment after he turned to me with such a sad smile, and said, " I am constantly preaching submission and contentment, but I find it hard to practise." I understood him, dear Isabel, and I am afraid you must make up your mind to let him love you still. You know I never was romantic, but when I look at Herbert Grey, I feel that it is impossible that he should change, or even forget. You cannot reproach me now, for I have told you all that I know myself. I am afraid that it may give you pain, but I hardly fancy that you expected he would have forgotten you. He went to-day to spend a week or two with his father, and then goes back to D——, where he says he has a great deal to do.

I was very glad to hear such a good account of Mrs. Denison's health. I can hardly fancy Annie speaking French ; but she was always a quick little girl when she was in the school here. Her mother is longing to see her. My aunt sends her usual long list of messages, with an addition this time of gratitude for your remembrance of her. She spent half an

hour at the glass cupboard this morning, planning a new arrangement of her china; but she says it is quite useless, she knows, as you will be sure not to like her taste.

God bless you, my dearest child !

Your most affectionate aunt,

RACHEL C. SHEPHERD.

Mr. Price begs me to give his love to you, and is very angry, as I was obliged to own that I had not told you much news. He desires me to say that he has got a new curate at last. Mr. Bennett is a very good young man, I believe, but he is very different from Herbert. The young ladies are excited again, I think, judging by Mrs. Chapinan's window; but Mr. Bennett is not handsome, I am happy to say. Mrs. Franklin has a son, and is doing very well.

CHAPTER XX.

In climes full of sunshine, though splendid their dyes,
Yet faint is the odour the flowers shed about ;
'Tis the cloud and the mist of our own weeping skies
That call the rich spirit of fragrancy out.
So the wild glow of passion may kindle from mirth,
But 'tis only in grief true affection appears,
And e'en though to smiles it may first owe its birth,
The full soul of its sweetness is drawn out by tears.

MOORE.

We must follow Clarence Broke to India.

During the dreary monotony of the long sea voyage he first fully realized all his loss, all the intensity of his passion for Isabel. He had known before how deeply he loved her—at her first words of doubt, he had felt it; but, in the excitement that preceded his departure from England, he had more felt that he was wretched than realized the actual loss he had

sustained—the void in his heart—the void in his future life. Now, in the calmer but drearier sorrow of these long, unemployed days, he went over in his mind the past, recalling it in all its brightness, and tried to look into the future,—but from the latter his spirit shrunk. It was not now that he felt, for the first time, the weariness of his aimless life, but it came back upon him with redoubled force. He had in the last few months found love, sympathy, his very brightest ideal of purity and nobleness; and suddenly he was alone again, and he recoiled from his loneliness.

For his love for Isabel had been love indeed: not such as he had felt before—the passing fancy of a boyish heart—but a love founded less on her surpassing loveliness, and the charm and grace of her manner and conversation, than on the truth and beauty of her mind. It was this that made the bitterest sting of his grief. It was not only that the fair idol he had set up was shattered—it was not only that the prize, which he thought he had but to extend his hand to take, was wrenched from

his grasp, but he seemed to be cast back upon the waters of life, which never had satisfied the thirst of his soul, to be tossed on them again without an end, without an aim.

Even in his earliest youth, aspirations after a higher and better life than that he led had floated before him—and they had all been realized in Isabel. She made him feel all the beauty of virtue, and, of late, visions of a career of duty and usefulness—which have an especial charm when first presented to those who, with an active mind, have led an idle, objectless life—were continually present to him; and their brightness who can doubt, when it was her angel smile and angel voice which were to guide him along the way? And now, all was over.

These were the thoughts—this was the concluding reflection—which, day by day, occupied and saddened his mind, as he stood, in the heat of noon and in the silence of night, alone upon the deck, his eyes resting, with a kind of dull satisfaction, on the unbroken expanse of water around him.

It was not now that a hope, however faint and distant, awoke in his mind, but there were times, even now, when he said within himself that he would become more worthy of Isabel. There were times when he remembered her words—that the dreariest life has the power to live for a better object than its own passing pleasure ; and though he still would ask himself, “How, in my wandering, desultory life, is duty to be found?” the thoughts were not altogether profitless. They gave, at least, the hope of some day bearing a better fruit, and winning a more lasting home in his heart.

There were those among his young companions on board, who wondered at the lonely habits and joyless brow of the once radiant Clarence ; and almost scornfully inquired why, in a lot apparently so bright and so cloudless, he could not be as light-hearted as themselves. But his melancholy was no

“Forgery of fancy, and a dream of woes.”

When we have set our *heart* on any object, whatever that object may be, we make it a

portion of ourselves, and it requires a painful wrench to separate from it; and this pain is tenfold increased when the judgment approves what the affections have made their own. Nothing is so easy as to marvel at the sorrows of others; nothing so difficult as to submit to them when they touch ourselves.

On Clarence's arrival in India, his intense desire for active service was gratified. His energy, his quickness, his restless and disinterested wish for employment, for its own sake, soon brought him into notice, and he was entrusted with missions of more than ordinary importance.

He was gratified more than once by being appointed to head detachments, sent far up into the wildest parts of the country; and, on these occasions, in the hard and often dangerous life he led, compelled to think, to be ever watchful, to depend on the strength of his own mind and the readiness of his observation, for the preservation of the many lives entrusted to him, his character deepened, strengthened, and was purified. And day by

day did he become more worthy of the happiness he had lost, when he lost his hope of Isabel.

From her his thoughts never wandered. As time passed on, and no tidings reached him of her marriage, a faint hope dawned again, and coloured with a hue of its own brightness the severity of the life he led.

Two years passed away, and he never heard of her—never even saw her name mentioned. He was often, for weeks together, without either letters or newspapers; but when, from his active duty, he returned again to the habitations of men—he would devour the records of fashionable life in London, spell over whole columns of uninteresting names, in the hope of one mention of her, but always in vain. Mr. Denison wrote to him twice on business, gave Emmeline's love, but was silent as to his daughter.

The cause of Clarence's absence was unknown to his numerous acquaintance; and, if they had any guesses on the subject, they did but make them avoid more scrupulously any

mention of Isabel's name in their occasional communications with him; and Clarence, too, was silent. He had not confided his attachment to any one when in England—he made no inquiries now.

But hope dawned again. This hope was founded partly on the simple fact that her marriage had never, to his knowledge, been announced; partly upon a confidence that Herbert Grey's character was too noble to take her hand without her heart; partly on the one confession of love which burst from Isabel's lips. At times, this hope seemed a strong foundation to build upon; at times, weak as water. But still, strong or weak, it *was* a hope; and, during the latter part of his stay in India, a hope continually present to his mind.

“And, oh, Isabel!” he would sometimes say, “I am not altogether unworthy of you! Never, in thought even, have I been unfaithful to your memory.”

“Perhaps,” once his heart suggested, “it is because my constancy has not been tried;”

and immediately his restless spirit longed that a temptation might come to him in his present life.

These details have doubtless been tedious, but they are necessary.

In the winter of the third year of his stay in India, his desire to know his fate became suddenly too intense to bear; and, to the great regret of all, high and low, he resigned his appointment, and engaged a cabin in the vessel that sailed for England early in February. His going was, however, delayed for a few weeks by an incident which affected him deeply at the time, and was not without its effect afterwards.

A few days before he sailed for England, he was riding with a young man to whom he was much attached, in a lonely, mountainous path. Suddenly, the horse of his friend stumbled, and he was thrown with violence to the ground. When Clarence raised him, he was insensible. With much fatigue, he carried him to a herdsman's hut, at some distance, and

there, after a few hours of pain, and before help could be obtained, the young man expired. In an interval of consciousness, before his death, he told Clarence of his engagement to a young girl at Calcutta, to whom he was to have been married the following month, and with her to have returned to England. He implored Clarence to go to her himself, and break the news of his death; and, provided she and her mother were willing to go with him, he entrusted them to his charge, to convey to England and to London.

To Mrs. Hervey, the mother of the girl, Clarence went on first reaching Calcutta. She was the widow of an officer who had died in India; and, as the engagement of her child was her only tie to that country, she willingly consented to proceed, under Clarence's charge, to England. To the daughter, Ellinor Hervey, Clarence, with the utmost kindness and feeling, broke the news of her lover's sad and sudden death. The sorrow of the poor girl was painful to see; it was, as some French writer says, "*Tant de larmes*

que merveille;” and, unaccustomed to a character as soft and tender as Ellinor’s, Clarence was deeply touched by the multitude of her tears, and her utter self-abandonment to sorrow.

Day after day he returned to console her; and, even before their departure for England, his efforts were, in some degree, crowned with success.

CHAPTER XXI.

I must not call her case a broken heart ;
Nor dare I take upon me to maintain
That hearts once broken never heal again.

CRABBE.

It was the middle of March before they embarked for England. The hurry of starting was of great use to Ellinor ; it cured the nervous part of her sorrow ; and, before many days, she was able to bear, with tolerable cheerfulness, a part in the common events and common conversation which vary the monotony of a long sea-voyage. She and Clarence were necessarily much together. He considered her as his own peculiar and sacred charge ; and, however engaged in his own occupations, or more interesting meditations, he never could see a pensive look on her brow without flying to her side, and remaining there till his efforts had chased the cloud away.

He was much assisted in diverting her mind by an old man on board, who took a great fancy to her pretty face and soft, gentle manners. Mr. Rushbrook was an English Indian merchant, with a rosy face and a good-humoured smile; and, if the term might be applied rather to warmth and expansiveness than depth, he might have merited Mrs. Skewton's favourite eulogium of being "all heart." His first passion in life was to make acquaintances; and, when he had made them, to love them and serve them to the utmost of his power. His next passion was to make his many acquaintances acquainted with each other, and to try and persuade them also to love with the warmth and unselfishness of his own nature. As may be supposed, in this latter passion, he met with frequent disappointments. The sunshine of his open-hearted manners, however, diffused a great warmth over the society on board the *Victoria*.

Clarence and Ellinor, Mr. Rushbrook delighted in seeing together; not, as might be imagined, with any views of love and marriage

(he had other projects for Ellinor in his head), but simply because "it was such a pleasure for young people to be friends." Every evening at sunset, he would retire to a distant part of the deck with Ellinor, and, calling Clarence to follow, would insist on his reading to them volume after volume of sentimental poetry, drawn from a pocket capacious as his heart. And Clarence, seeing that Ellinor's soft blue eyes brightened at the very mention of their evening's employment, invariably complied without a murmur.

Ellinor Hervey's was no uncommon character. The whole occupation of her life was to love; her whole pleasure, to be loved. The latter was only a pleasure—the former was a necessity of her nature. She could not stand alone—she was forced to cling to another. Again and again the rocks on which she leaned might be torn from her, and her heart might be scarred with the wounds of continual disappointment; but still, while she lived, she would find it necessary to her very existence to love. When such a disposition is joined to

strong principle, and, in any degree, strength of mind, it is not, perhaps, a faultless, but a very pleasing character; but, when it stands alone, the reigning and governing influence, it is, to say the least, dangerous; and such was Ellinor's case.

Dangerous, however, as such a character may be, it is not without its peculiar charm and attraction — especially to the old, or to those who, having passed in disappointment the first flush of their youth, are old in mind. The ready sympathy, the instant yielding to the lightest word of kindness — these are charms which those who have suffered from the hardness of the world are ever ready to appreciate. There was also, at this time, from the late influence of sorrow, a higher tone than was usual to her in Ellinor's mind; and she was, in consequence, a more interesting companion than in other scenes she might have been.

The time went by quick from its very monotony, and they drew near to England.

One night, Clarence had stood, for up-

wards of an hour, with his arms crossed, gazing on the starry sky, and the reflection of the stars in the sea. It was a moonlight night; and the air, calm, and fresh, and beautiful, had tempted many of the passengers upon deck. Clarence was roused from his reverie by the soft voice of Ellinor Hervey.

“Are you fond of looking at the stars, Lord Clarence?”

“Very fond indeed,” he answered, without in the least knowing what she said, for his thoughts were far away.

“And do you understand them? I mean, do you know one star from another?”

“Oh! the stars!—No, I don’t know much about them; but I like to watch them. They are very superstitious about the stars in India, and I have caught the feeling, in some degree. I often wonder which is the star of my destiny.”

“I have heard,” said Ellinor, “it is thought that every one has a peculiar star.”

“Yes, and one of their ideas is, that, if a person is doomed to die, the star of his

destiny is visible to every eye except his own. I heard a pretty story on that subject in India;—shall I tell it you?”

“O, yes!” said Ellinor, eagerly.

“Two brothers, the one come to manhood, the other a boy many years younger, were walking together in the garden of their own home, on the eve of the day on which the elder brother was to sail for India.

“Though their ages were so different, there had always been a peculiarly strong attachment between the two.

“As they walked along, the elder brother pointed to a bright star, and said—

“‘That is my favourite star; when I am gone, when we are in far different countries, let us watch that star; our eyes may, perhaps, rest upon it at the same moment.’ The boy promised, and they parted.

“Many years afterwards, the younger brother joined the elder in India. It was a time of war; and, a few days after their meeting, the regiment to which the two brothers belonged was ordered to the attack of some

dangerous place. On the eve of the engagement, they walked again together in the bright moonlight.

“‘There is your star,’ said the younger one; ‘I never forgot my promise, whenever it was visible.’

“The elder brother looked up into the heavens. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it was my favourite star; but there is a brighter one here, that I have often watched;’ and he pointed to a brilliant star shining above their heads; but the boy could not see it.

“‘See there,’ said the elder brother, with excited eagerness—for the superstition flashed upon his memory—‘it is straight above your head—the brightest star in all the heavens.’

“But the boy looked in vain.

“The next night, he was numbered amongst the dead.”

“How very, very pretty!” said Ellinor, gently, “but how sad! I think that in future I shall always be afraid of pointing to a beautiful star.”

“Don’t be afraid with me,” said Clarence,

smiling. In a more melancholy tone, he added, "If you would choose me a bright star for the star of my destiny, I should be very grateful; but, remember, it *must* be a bright one."

"Your destiny is sure to be a bright one, Lord Clarence."

He shook his head.

"It seems to me," continued Ellinor, "that everybody is unhappy when they are young; and they think, for a time, that happiness never can come again; but it does come."

"Do you think it will come?" he said, turning eagerly towards her. Then, ashamed of the folly of his question, he changed its application from his own case to hers. "You think," he asked, gently, and with a kind interest, "that you can be happy again?"

"Yes," she said, slowly; "you, Lord Clarence, have taught me that it is possible."

He thought she alluded to the advice he many times had given her; advice which, the preacher felt, he had not practised in his own case; and, kindly saying he was glad

to have been of use to her, he left her. But afterwards the words recurred to his mind with another meaning ; and, though he rejected the thought as impossible, still the fear returned again and again, that, while he had been thinking only of comforting her, he had suffered himself to gain her affections.

The following day, as they sate on deck for their evening reading, Clarence looked through the volume handed to him by Mr. Rushbrook, and selected a trifling, commonplace poem, called "Eternal Constancy." The tone and feeling, however, with which he read, gave, as was usually the case, some beauty to the verses. It ended thus :—

The night of sorrow darkly closed
Upon his summer's radiant beam,
And there, through life, the cloud reposed—
He had no further dream.

In vain was beauty's dazzling light,
The charm of gentler smiles in vain ;
Her form stood ever in his sight —
He never loved again.

Ellinor was silent as he concluded.

"Now, that is all very fine," said Mr.

Rushbrook, "very beautiful poetry, but only poetry. 'Never loved again!' why, what a life the man must have led! What does Lord Byron say? 'Man was not formed to live alone;' and a higher authority says, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' We must love, we must cling to something."

"True," said Clarence, and he too was silent.

"Can you find some verses that take Mr. Rushbrook's view?" said Ellinor, gently, and without raising her eyes from the ground.

The volume was composed of a selection from many authors; and Clarence, after some moments' search, read the following lines:—

* * * *

She had come forth, saddened, but calm again,
 To mingle with her kind—the time was past
 When earth's illusions could o'ercloud her brain,
 Dizzy with its attractions. The wild blast,
 That rent the fabric of her early dream,
 Had left its shadows on earth's brightest gleam.

.

She had not dreamed of love—she deemed 'twas past,
 Her day of love;—yet, as a sudden blast
 Will sweep the silent harpstrings till they wake,
 So was her spirit touched, and, ere she knew, it spake.

.

His eye was bright, and hers was dark and sad ;
Soft were her tones and slow—his voice was glad ;
Ardent in youth and health, and full of life
And hope was he. Her heart was crushed with grief :
And yet, 'twas strange, they loved. Deeper than eye
could see,
Their souls had some untold, undreamt-of sympathy.

She loved again—he had not told he loved,
Yet well she knew what thoughts they were that moved
His spirit when he watched her, and his eye
Fell on her face earnestly, speakingly.
She felt it with a mingled joy and pain—
Felt that she loved, and was beloved again.

* * * * *

As he finished, and his eye wandered to Ellinor's face, she got up and joined her mother, who sate at some little distance.

“ Those are pretty lines,” said Mr. Rushbrook. “ I never saw them. Where do they come from ? ”

“ ‘ Second Love, ’ ” said Clarence ; and he handed the book to Mr. Rushbrook, while his eyes anxiously followed Ellinor.

“ You agree with me, Lord Clarence ; I'm sure,” said Mr. Rushbrook, who was a most

determined talker. He gave a kind of nod with his head towards Ellinor, and continued —“ It is very well to read of eternal constancy, but it would not do in real life. We should not like it.”

“ I am not able to judge,” said Clarence, more to himself than answering Mr. Rushbrook. “ It is easier to write of constancy, I fancy, than to practise it. Most natures require something to love, and perhaps there are few who can be satisfied without a present love to lean upon.”

“ Exactly,” said Mr. Rushbrook ; “ that is exactly what I think—the more love the better ; in every sense of the word, better.”

“ It seems to me,” continued Clarence, in the same musing tone, “ that, if we could find something superior to what we loved before, it would be easy to love again : but, if we have fixed our affections on one raised above the common world, and the world’s common inhabitants, it is hard, hard to change.” And, as he spoke, he too walked away, not to join Ellinor, but to a distant part of the deck,

where, among the common sailors, he found—what he rarely found on board the *Victoria*—solitude.

“She loves me,” he repeated once or twice, as he sate there alone; then, suddenly, as a thrill of joy ran through his soul, “Oh, Isabel, I have been tried, and neither in word nor thought have I been unfaithful to you!” and, though he sate alone, his eye flashed with the thought.

It faded again as, with something of remorse and tender interest, his mind reverted to Ellinor. “She must know it,” he continued. “I must tell her that I love another.”

Had she loved any one but himself, after so late and crushing a grief, he would probably have condemned her as heartless: but we are often apt to make exceptions in favour of ourselves.

CHAPTER XXII.

The dawning of morn, the daylight's sinking,
The night's long hours, still find me thinking
Of thee, thee, only thee.

Where friends are met, and goblets crowned,
And smiles are near that once enchanted,
Unreached by all that sunshine round,
My soul, like some dark spot, is haunted
By thee, thee, only thee.

MOORE.

It was not many days after the conversations related in the last chapter, that one morning, while the passengers sate together at breakfast, the captain came in with the joyful intelligence, that, on the evening of the next day, at latest, they would land in England. A murmur, almost a cry of joy, broke from every one present, except Clarence and Ellinor.

To Ellinor the time passed pleasantly, for

she loved Clarence ; and, while she lived in his continual presence, she was happy. To her, therefore, the announcement gave only pain.

And Clarence — was it any thought of Ellinor that made him knit his brows, and gave such an intense expression of thought and anxiety to his features? No; Isabel — only Isabel: he could not hear that, in a few days, almost a few hours, his fate would be decided with calmness or with joy. What in the distance had been hope, changed, in that moment, to unmingled fear.

“Why so silent, Miss Ellinor?” said Mr. Rushbrook, gaily. “Have you no happy thoughts of old England? ‘My native land, my native land,’” he repeated — “‘Breathes there a man with soul so dead,’ &c.—‘England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.’ I can’t exactly remember the poem I mean.” He was quite excited with his quotations.

“I very soon grow fond of a place,” said Ellinor, quietly.

“Not of the place, my dear Miss Hervey; you must not waste your heart on places. Of

the company, I grant you; and I can tell you, Miss Ellinor, the company don't mean to lose sight of you. *We* are friends for life, are we not? And I have many who will soon be dying to make your acquaintance."

Ellinor smiled at him with the soft, gentle smile which had so early won his heart; and then, seeing that Clarence had left the breakfast-table, she too slipped away, and ran upon deck.

Clarence was standing with a long glass in his hand, gazing in the direction of England. Ellinor took her work, and sate down near him; but it was long before he turned and saw her.

"Are you as happy to be near England as Mr. Rushbrook is?" she asked, at last.

He laid down the glasses, and came and stood by her. He hoped an opportunity might arise to speak.

"No, not happy," he answered. "Fear and anxiety do not consist with happiness, do they? I long to be there: and yet, if I could

delay it for a week, for a month even, I believe I would have it so."

"You have, then, in England," she said, in a low voice, "some that you love very much?"

"I have some that I love," he began, and paused; for even to speak of Isabel was painful to him; but, for Ellinor's sake, it must be done: "and one"—he fixed his eyes upon her as he spoke—"one whom, I dare scarcely own, even to myself, what it is I feel for *her*."

A blush passed over Ellinor's face, and she turned her head away for a moment; then gently said, "She is very happy."

Clarence looked down tenderly on the young girl; her soft but humble nature touched him deeply; but he continued—"If she *is* happy—I am—I know not what. What will you think of me, when I tell you that I have not heard of her for nearly three years, and that when I left her she was engaged to be married to another!"

Ellinor raised her large blue eyes in wonder.

"Is it not like the eternal constancy of which you read?"

They were both silent for a few minutes ; then Ellinor looked up again. “ And if she is married ? ” she asked.

He made no answer.

She repeated her question. The depth of that love, the anguish of that heart at the idea she presented, she had no power to penetrate. To her second inquiry he made no answer but by a look ; but words had never spoken to her heart as that look now spoke. She shrank from the agony it revealed.

The discovery of his attachment made no difference in Ellinor’s feelings for Clarence. She had not loved him with any ultimate view : she always supposed that she should be married ; but marriage was not the object of her heart. So long as she was near him, so long as he spoke to her so gently, and cared for her so tenderly, she was perfectly happy.

In the afternoon of the following day, they anchored in sight of Dover ; but there was some delay in disembarking. Many went

ashore in boats, and so on immediately to London; but Clarence remained with Mrs. Hervey and Ellinor. He might have given them over to Mr. Rushbrook, who also remained; but his promise to his friend had been to see them to London, and he wished to fulfil it to the letter. Besides this, delay, delay was now the one thought that possessed his mind. Till now he had hoped—he had not prepared himself to meet his fate: he must begin now—he must strengthen himself. He would wait; he would make no inquiries.

It was towards evening when they landed. Mr. Rushbrook dined with them at the inn.

After dinner, he took up the newspaper, but first offered it to Clarence. Clarence shuddered, and shook his head. He felt as if it must contain his destiny. Opening the window, he leaned far out, and looked on the sea, to withdraw himself from the sound of the news which Mr. Rushbrook detailed to his companions.

“Bless me! ‘a marriage on the tapis between the daughter of a peer and the nephew

of a gentleman well known in the commercial world.' That can't be Sam, Mrs. Hervey, surely? he never would do such a foolish thing as that. 'Her Majesty has caused to be issued cards for a State Ball, on the 18th instant; it is said that above 1700 persons have received invitations.' Ah, my dear Miss Ellinor! I'm afraid we shan't go there! But, bless me! what do I see? Mrs. Greathead—that's my sister—has a concert on the 12th; that's to-morrow. We are just in time—'the very best singers, and a numerous assemblage of company.' How delightful, and how fortunate we are! Mrs. Hervey, Miss Ellinor, you must come—I take no denial. I'm going to live with my sister; she will be charmed to make your acquaintance. Promise me to come."

"Gracious me, Mr. Rushbrook! how can we go alone?" said Mrs. Hervey, impatiently. "I should like of all things to go, but I know nobody in all England."

"Ah, that's true! but I will fetch you myself; or, stay, Lord Clarence, that will do much better. Lord Clarence!...."

Clarence was forced to attend, but was going most resolutely to refuse the invitation, when he met the sorrowful, imploring eyes of Ellinor. He relented at once.

“After all,” he said to himself, “it does not much matter. I suppose I shall know about as many people as if it were at Mexico.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

Sir, you have done enough, and have performed
A saint-like sorrow—no fault could you make,
Which you have not redeemed—indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass—at the last.
. forgive yourself.

Winter's Tale.

The five front windows of Mr. Denison's house in Grosvenor Square were brilliant with light. The Square was crowded with carriages; for beauty of arrangement and for selection of the company, it was *the* ball of the season. It was the celebration of a great event in Mr. Denison's family.

Though it was late in the evening, people were still arriving. Mr. Denison stood leaning against the bannisters, and he smiled with unwonted brightness as many an old friend passed him by, and shook him cordially by the hand.

At the door of the second drawing-room Mrs. Denison was seated. She was paler than she had been when last we met her, three years before this time; but, on her face also, there was a look of unusual brightness—a glow of unmingled joy and satisfaction. And by her side stood a fair girl, and she, too, was lovely as she had ever been; and yet she was changed.

She was on this night dressed with evident care. The gown of fresh-looking white, and the wreath of white roses in her hair, appeared to be worn in honour of the day; and yet her looks were not those of a day of festival.

She was changed, but it was difficult to say how changed. Though she was pale, there was no look of ill-health. Though calm, grave perhaps, her forehead was not seamed with the faintest frown; still she was changed. The flush of joy and excitement which once had made her beauty dazzling to behold was faded and gone. She smiled quietly on many of the passers-by. With a grave and quiet grace, again and again she joined in the dance,

but no glow of pleasure lighted her eyes or flew to her cheek. She alone seemed to look on the brilliant scene without dislike, and yet with indifference.

Many were gazing at her, for she now was rarely seen. Many were speculating on her feelings this night. Many were recalling the days of her first brilliant appearance. None beheld her without interest, and there were few that sighed over the past; few who did not own that she was lovelier now—few who did not feel strangely attracted by the pure, angel-like look of those calm, dark eyes.

“Have you not been dancing, my fair Isabel?” said an old man, approaching her. “The queen of the night should not stand alone.”

“I have been dancing, thank you,” she answered.

“You don’t care for scenes like these,” said the old man, shaking his head at her (he was an uncle of Mrs. Denison’s). “Do you know, Isabel, it almost makes me angry to see you look so cold and indifferent.”

“ I am not indifferent,” she said, smiling. “ I am very glad to see it all go off so well—very glad to see so many young faces happy. This is quite pleasure enough for one night.”

“ So many young faces happy. One would think you were a wrinkled old thing of a hundred and seventy ! I wish I could see you blush and smile, as I hear you did, not many, many years ago. Ah ! I have had a little success already. If you are not going to dance, will you come with me, and I will see what I can do ?”

He held out his arm, and led her into a conservatory, beyond which only a few people were seated.

“ We are as good as alone here,” said Mr. Courteney, smiling, as he noted the earnest conversation of those who surrounded them ; “ shall I tell you what people say of you—the three reasons that are given for your indifference to the world ?”

“ If you please,” said Isabel, with some curiosity.

“ Well, the first is, that you think going out wrong—religious scruples. Only a few say this.”

She smiled.

“ Another is, that you are angry or disappointed, at your little brother’s birth.”

“ What, little Ernest !” she said, with some excitement. “ Is it possible that any one can think so ill of me as that ?”

“ Not so very ill, dear Isabel. It would be but a little natural that, having been an heiress for so long, you should be sorry—just sorry—to be supplanted.”

“ But why should I wish to be an heiress ? Surely that is not so very enviable a position ; and, even supposing that I could be so envious for myself, would it not more than make up for it to see ‘papa so happy ? Don’t you think that even the expression of his face is changed ?”

“ You are a dutiful little girl—that I see,” said Mr. Courteney, kindly patting her shoulder. “ Well, and now for my third grand reason. Are you curious ?”

“A little,” and she blushed slightly; for she guessed what it must be.

“Here it is, then. Some say that you are in love. Some give your heart to a young clergyman in the country, who is supposed to prevent your going out into the world.” A cloud passed over Isabel’s brow. “But others send your heart far away, in a different direction;” and the old man looked smilingly in her face.

A deep blush rose to her cheek, and Mr. Courteney clapped his hands. “Didn’t I say that I should make you blush? See how well I understand young ladies’ hearts!”

His voice was slightly raised in the moment of triumph, and Isabel looked anxiously round, then put her hand in his arm. “Let us go back,” she said; and he led her slowly to the door of the ball-room; but the interminable Polka was still playing.

As they stood together, Mr. Courteney looked at his companion, and he saw that her cheek was paler, and her brow graver, than they had been before.

“You are not angry with me, dear Isabel?”

You know that, if I speak lightly to you, I am discretion itself with other people."

"Oh, no! very far from angry. You made me happy for a moment," she continued, speaking hurriedly, as when she spoke of herself she always did. "There are some things which I am afraid to think of; and yet I do think of them," and she smiled, but sadly.

"Why should you be afraid to think?" said Mr. Courteney, kindly.

"Because....tell me," she said, in the same hurried manner, "do you think error can ever be atoned for? I mean, after a sacrifice, a great punishment, may one wish to be happy again?"

There was no apparent connection in the conversation, and Mr. Courteney looked at her with surprise.

"I hardly know why I ask you this to-night. I felt as if I was forced to do it."

"My dear child, I hardly understand what you mean;" but, as he spoke, some old story recurred to his mind. He began again, more gravely: "I don't think you speak quite rightly, my dear child—we, none of us, strictly

speaking, deserve happiness ; but, if it comes to us, surely we ought to accept it with gratitude."

" Even if we have done very, very wrong ?"

" Yes, my child ; even then, if we have repented. But I must not have you speak in this way, Isabel ; that fair brow of yours belies you if you have ever done very wrong."

The music stopped, the crowd dispersed, and Isabel withdrew her arm from Mr. Courteney.

" If you see Mrs. Denison, would you say that I shall soon be back ? Thank you for all you have said," and she disappeared in an instant.

She threaded her way through the crowd, to a balcony in one of the rooms, where, though it was covered in, the air blew freshly. It was empty, and she sate down to think. " Does suffering wash out the past ? I have heard to-day that Clarence is soon to be back. If he should come—if he should love me still—is it possible—might I be happy now ?—I have suffered so much ! None, no one, can

know what I have suffered—what I do suffer ; and yet, I almost dread the thought of happiness ! I feel that never, never, can I deserve to be happy again.”

Her reverie was interrupted by voices near her, just inside the balcony. They were only talking of elections, and she did not think it necessary to move. Suddenly, her attention was arrested by the following words :

“ Oh ! Clarence Broke will stand again, I dare say, and he’s quite sure. I heard, at Brooks’s to-night, that he arrived to-day.”

“ Indeed ! From India, I suppose ?”

A smile, a radiant smile passed over Isabel’s face, and the next few sentences were lost in the tumultuous beating of her heart.

“ I used to think he was in love with Miss Denison,” said one of the speakers.

“ So did I, but I suppose that’s over now. Three years is too much for constancy, I fancy. Segrave says there never was such a flirtation as was kept up on board ; and he stays at Dover to-night, to come with the young lady, to-morrow, to London.”

“ Can suffering atone for sin ?” This was the thought that passed through Isabel’s mind, as the visions of joy, which, but an instant before, had danced before her eyes, faded into the darkness of despair. “ I deserve it all ! Oh, Herbert ! I deserve it all !”

A servant came from Mr. Denison, to desire that she would begin the country-dance. She went at once, sad, pale, stupified as she was, by the blow she had received.

“ What is the matter, Isabel ?” said her father, as he met her. “ I am afraid you must have got a headache. Don’t dance : I will find somebody else to begin.”

“ Oh ! no, thank you, papa, I had much rather dance ;” and she hastily gave her hand to Lord Vernon, who placed her at the top of the room.

There were many remarks on her appearance as she went down the dance — many speculations as to its cause. Her dress, and her cheeks, white as her dress, and to which neither the excitement nor the exercise added a tinge of colour, gave an almost unnatural

appearance to her dark eyes, and twice Lord Vernon begged her to sit down. But she persisted; a kind of morbid feeling of self-punishment had long since taken possession of her mind, and in these moments of intenser suffering, she almost rejoiced. She felt as if they were an acceptable offering to Herbert—to Herbert, whose unceasing prayer was for her happiness.

That suffering must, in some degree, follow evil, is what we all believe; but there was, perhaps, something of pride and self-reliance in Isabel's stern condemnation of herself, and in her stoical endurance of the trials that met her in her life. There is often more humility in forgiving ourselves—in having patience with ourselves—than in our severest judgments. In Isabel, however, pride, if such there were, was pride of which she was unconscious. It was her natural severe condemnation of evil, visited on herself without mercy. She condemned, while she pitied, error in others: in herself, it was condemnation without pity.

“ You looked so pale last night, Isabel,” said Mr. Denison, at breakfast, the next morning, “ that I hardly like to ask you to go out again to-night. But, if you think you could go to Mr. Greathead’s concert for a little while, I wish it very much.”

Isabel eagerly caught at the idea. She was in that state of doubt and anxiety when quietness is the worst of evils.

“ Mr. Greathead was very civil to me once in India. Probably there will be no one there you ever saw before, for he is an India merchant, living in the Regent’s Park, but your going is an attention which I should much like you to pay. Emmeline must not go, but Mrs. Courteney will take you.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

And once again we met, and a fair girl was near him :
He smiled, and whispered low, as I once used to hear him ;
She leant upon his arm—once 'twas mine and mine only—
I wept, for I deserved to feel wretched and lonely.

Song.

The beautiful Miss Denison was seated in the highest place at Mr. Greathead's concert, for her going was a great honour. Disliking, however, so prominent a situation, she pushed back her chair into a little recess, shaded with yellow damask curtains, from whence she could more comfortably attend to the concert, which promised, from the singers and the selection of music, to be a beautiful one.

In spite of her anxiety, she was pleased ; and, as Grisi finished a beautiful air from *Semiramide*, she leaned forward to express her admiration to Mr. Greathead. As she did so,

her attention was attracted by a figure that stood in the doorway. The head was turned away, but was it, could it be—Clarence?

Involuntarily she threw herself back, but from the recess, though she almost laughed at her fancy, kept her eye on the doorway. After a few minutes, several persons moved; and she saw that the figure which had so much attracted her attention was bent down, in earnest conversation with a young and lovely girl who held his arm. Suddenly he raised himself—he moved his head—and, once more, Clarence was before her.

He gazed into the room, looked listlessly around, shook his head, and spoke again to the young girl beside him: smiled upon her, his own sweet, thoughtful smile, and they disappeared in the crowd.

A crimson flush—a flush of anger and pride—for a moment rose on Isabel's pale cheek. Then followed that utter sinking of despair, when hope, every hope in life, seems blighted in a moment of time. And then came a strange kind of enjoyment in the agony she

endured. "It is well, it is well," she repeated; "my father forsook my mother; I forsook him who so truly loved me, and it is well that I, too, should be forgotten—forsaken!" Then, all these moods of mind passed by, and doubt, and fear, and hope, all rose again, with a restless impatience to see more.

In vain the sweetest sounds that ever fell, united from the lips of Grisi and Mario. She heard nothing—she saw nothing—she smiled mechanically in return for Mr. Greathead's repeated thanks and compliments, but she said nothing. Her eyes were on that place from whence she had seen Clarence vanish: there she expected to see him appear again.

The concert was over. Mrs. Courteney moved, followed by Isabel, through the crowd, but it was so great that they got on but slowly. For a moment, there was an opening in the crowd, and she gave a piercing glance forward, and once more beheld Clarence.

He was standing at the top of the staircase, and the young girl was still beside him. His head was bent towards her, and Isabel fancied that still he smiled.

“ Let us go home,” she said earnestly to Mrs. Courteney ; “ pray let us go home.”

Mrs. Courteney consented, but it was with a pang. She had heard that there was to be a magnificent supper, and she had the usual fancy of old ladies for seeing everything that was to be seen. Perhaps, on this occasion, seeing was not all that was in her mind. But Isabel’s wearied, jaded look prevailed ; and, when they reached the bottom of the staircase, she gave orders for their carriage to be called.

As they were some of the very few who resisted Mr. Greathead’s civil invitation to come and have something warm and comfortable, the call was soon successful. A young man came forward to take Isabel to the carriage. As she reached the doorway, Clarence came in from the street, and they met, face to face. She was hurried on, but her large mournful eyes met his earnest, startled, anxious gaze.

“ Who is that ? tell me, who is that ? the beautiful girl with the dark curls,” said Clarence, seizing an old man by the arm.

“That! why, don’t you know? it’s Miss Denison.”

“Miss Denison, did you say?”

“Yes. Let me see, now I think of it, did she marry? I once heard something—but, no; I am almost sure that she is Miss Denison still.”

Clarence had taken Mrs. Hervey and Ellinor to their carriage. He now walked home, without another word.

CHAPTER XXV.

When late I saw thy favourite child,
Methought my jealous heart would break.

BYRON.

Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.

SHAKESPEARE.

It was about the middle of the day following the concert.

Isabel sate in the front drawing-room, nursing her little brother, a really pretty baby, of about three months old. Her heart was lighter than it had been for many and many a day, for that one startled glance had told her that Clarence loved her still. There might be much to explain; there might be something, still, to fear; but he loved her;

and, at that moment, still to be loved, was all in all to her.

The little boy lay in her lap, and she was twisting the tassels of the blinds for his amusement, while now and then she sung to him snatches of her favourite songs. Half occupied with him, half musing on what the next few days would bring forth, she heard nothing, till the drawing-room door suddenly opened, and Lord Clarence Broke was announced. Seeing her alone, he came so rapidly, so hastily to her side, that she had not time to take the baby in her arms, and rise to meet him.

He stood once more beside her. He was about to take her hand in his, when his glance fell on the little Ernest Denison; and, as the child opened his large dark eyes and smiled, he looked the very image of Isabel. The hand of Clarence dropped—he moved from her side, and sat down on the chair opposite to her.

Both were silent. Isabel bent her face, crimson with agitation, over the child, and

nervously moved her long curls from his neck. She had not dared to raise her eyes, when Clarence got up again, and, murmuring a few unintelligible words, hastily left the room.

It was but the work of two minutes; and, when Mrs. Denison, who, on being told of his arrival, had instantly come down, opened the door—he was gone.

“They told me Clarence was here; and I came, as I thought you might like it best. Do you know where he is?”

“He is gone again,” said Isabel, blushing deeply; and, as she put the baby into Mrs. Denison’s arms, she murmured a few smiling words about his not having liked little Ernest.

Meanwhile, Clarence, pulling his hat over his face, walked rapidly from the house, unconscious where he went. The sudden pang of fear, and more than fear, had made him mad. “This is to hope in woman’s love—to trust to woman’s constancy!” he repeated over and over again; and still, as he walked rapidly along, the dark, smiling eyes of the

child seemed to follow him. He thought not of possibilities, nor yet of improbabilities; but he saw that lovely face bending tenderly over her child, and he strode along the street, like a maniac, till, suddenly, a vision of the soft loving eyes of Ellinor Hervey floated before him; and “she, at least, loves me,” passed through his mind.

A hand was laid upon his arm; he looked up—he was in Portland Place.

“How very fortunate I am!” said Mr. Rushbrook; “I had been to look for you, to ask you to let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister. She is dying to make your acquaintance; and, I believe, you were already on your way there. Pray let us go together.” And he put his hand through that of Clarence.

Thrown off his guard by Mr. Rushbrook’s confidence, Clarence walked on a few steps, revolving the possibility of escape—even at the sacrifice of Mr. Rushbrook’s neck, if it should be required, when the latter spoke again.

“Miss Hervey has been with Selina all

day. I took her there, this morning, to make acquaintance with my nephew, and they get on famously. Between ourselves, I wish that to be a match; and I spoke to my nephew, yesterday evening. He is very much in love already."

The vision of Ellinor had not yet faded from Clarence's indignant, agitated breast; and he went quietly on to visit Mrs. Greathead, smiling to himself at the uselessness of poor Mr. Rushbrook's plans.

They went into the house, and Mr. Rushbrook took him up stairs without announcement. As the door of the drawing-room opened, he saw Ellinor, seated on a sofa, with young Mr. Rushbrook, an exact counterpart of the old one—an amiable youth, who was falling in love very fast, at his uncle's request. Her head was bent towards him, and she appeared to be entirely engrossed by his conversation.

After a formal introduction to Mrs. Greathead, Clarence turned towards Ellinor, and she blushed and smiled, for he was not yet

supplanted ; but the momentary enchantment which had hung round the tenderness of her love was faded, and, though he sate beside her, it was in absence and in silence.

His thoughts were not of her ; there was not one pang of jealousy, one moment even of wonder, as she turned again from her gloomy neighbour to meet the smiles of Mr. Rushbrook. His mind had wavered again to Isabel, and, once more, not hope, but doubt, gained an entrance to his mind.

Suddenly it struck him that Mrs. Greathead would be able to tell him all he wished to know, and yet dared not ask ; and, swift as the thought, he rose from Ellinor's side, and took possession of a chair left vacant by the sofa on which that lady sate.

Mrs. Greathead was too much pleased at having an opportunity of talking to a lord to let it pass away unimproved ; and, in answer to a compliment on the beauty of her concert, she went off like a shower-bath.

“ Thank you, my lord, you are very kind to say so. I did think it went off very well.

I had wished to give a ball, to show off our new house,"—with a glance of pride round the room—"but Mr. Greathead was determined to have a concert. He is quite devoted to music; and, as you say, my lord, it went off very well, though, I dare say, many young people were longing to be skipping about all the while. We were very much honoured at your lordship's coming—after such a long voyage, too. I was happy to hear that you did not suffer much at sea. Samuel can talk of nothing but you, and his pretty little friend, Miss Hervey. Ah, yes, my lord! quite a case already, I assure you! Samuel is quite bent upon it, and my nephew has no objection, as you see. Well, it will be a very nice thing, provided the young people love each other; otherwise, having made a love marriage myself, I...."

Here Mrs. Greathead was stopped by a slight cough, and Clarence broke the thread of her discourse.

"You had several beautiful girls here last night," he began, with a beating heart. "Can

you tell me the name of one with very dark hair?"

"Oh! it must have been Miss Cotton, or Miss Letitia Vincent, perhaps. She has most beautiful hair—or little Miss Primrose, who came out last night. We...."

"No; it was a girl with long curls and very dark eyes. You must know which I mean," he said, almost impatiently.

"Oh, you mean Mr. Denison's daughter. Yes, very beautiful, indeed—quite an honour to our room. It was very kind of her to come. Mr. Greathead was once of some use to Mr. Denison in India, and he does not forget it, as most people do. Yes, she is very beautiful; but they say she looks paler than she used to do. Some say it is the disappointment about the money."

"What money?" asked Clarence, fearfully.

"Oh! why, you know she was a great heiress, and now there's a young gentleman appeared unexpectedly! I mean, Mrs. Denison has had a little boy"—in answer to Clarence's wondering eyes—"and so she loses the

money. Not but what they say she will have plenty ; but, when once a person has been an heiress, they don't quite like giving it up again. But how flushed you do look, my lord ! Won't you take some wine and water to cool you this very hot day ? Samuel, ring the bell ; Lord Clarence will take some sherry and water ; the day is so very warm."

Clarence, however, declined the hospitality ; shook Mrs. Greathead's hand with great cordiality, in return for the information she had given him ; the same with Messrs. Rushbrook, senior and junior, and, lastly, with Ellinor.

He is so largely happy, that it seems
Earth has no woes, and sorrows are but dreams.

When Mrs. Denison came home from driving, she found the following note :—

Dover Street, Thursday.

Dear Emmeline,

A thousand, thousand times I wish you joy of the happy event which I have only

just heard of. May I come and tell you in person how very happy it has made me? Dear Emmeline, will you be as kind to me now as you were three years ago?

Yours affectionately,

C. B.

Emmeline smiled, gave the note to Isabel; and sate down to answer it.

My dear Clarence,

I have only just found your note. Many, many thanks. Pray come this evening, or whenever you like. If this evening, I am afraid you will miss the sight of my little Ernest; but I hope you admired him this morning.

Yours,

E. D.

They had just come up from dinner when Clarence arrived. After the first meeting, silence seemed to creep over all the party.

Isabel placed herself on the sofa, by Mrs. Denison, far out of Clarence's reach. She took up her work, and sate grave and embarrassed.

Clarence was absent and pre-occupied, and Emmeline and Mr. Denison tried in vain to support the conversation.

Wearied at last, Mr. Denison saw he must help them. "Go and sing, Isabel; sing my favourite song, 'No, not more welcome.' Do you know it, Clarence?"

Happy to be employed, Isabel hurried to the pianoforte, and began at once. As she ended—

"I'd live years of grief and pain
To have my long sleep of sorrow broken,
By that benign, blessed voice again,"

Clarence, unable any longer to contain himself, rose, and went to the pianoforte.

"Now, Emmeline, read me this speech," said Mr. Denison, giving her a newspaper.

The speech was finished, and Mr. Denison glanced round. "I think you must begin it again," he said, with a smile, to his wife; but,

as he spoke, Isabel came towards him, kissed him, and glided away.

Over the brightness of that hour, there hovered a shadow from the mournful eyes of Herbert Grey.

END OF VOL. I.





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